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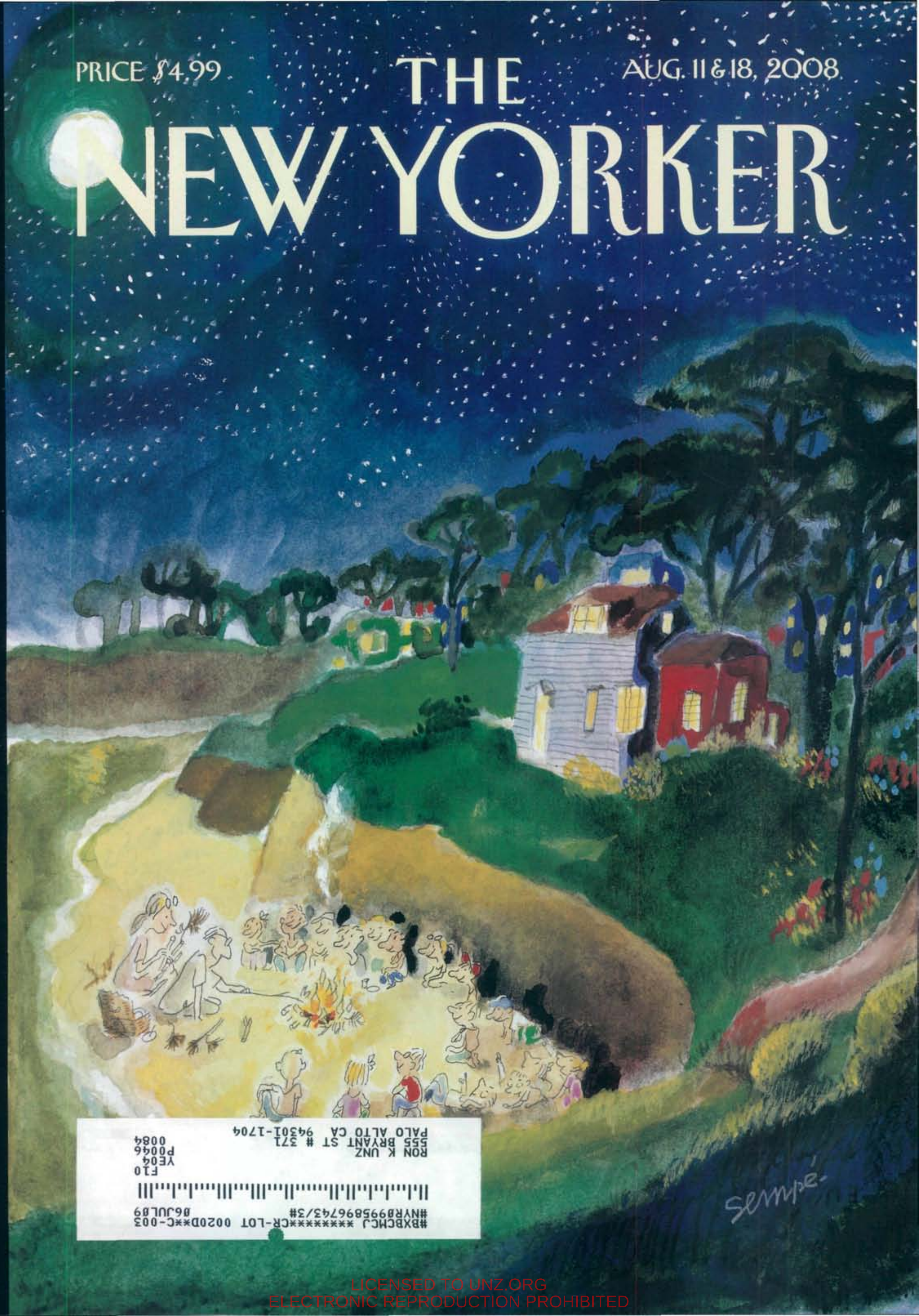
THE NEW YORKER

AUG. 11 & 18, 2008



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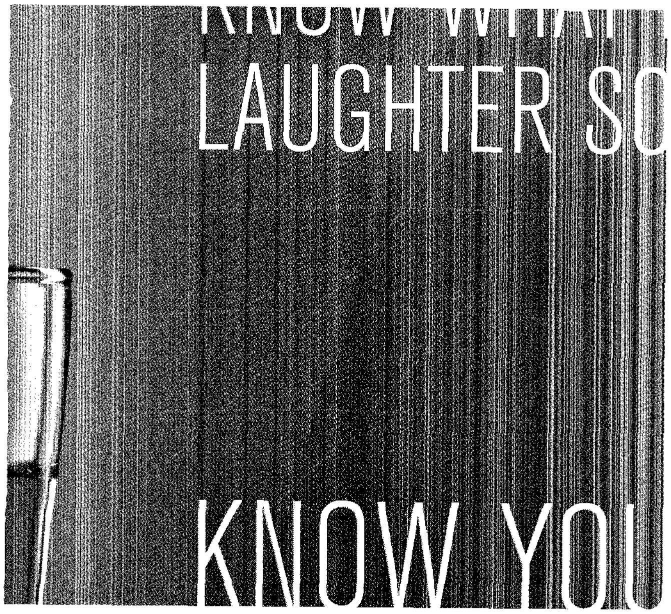
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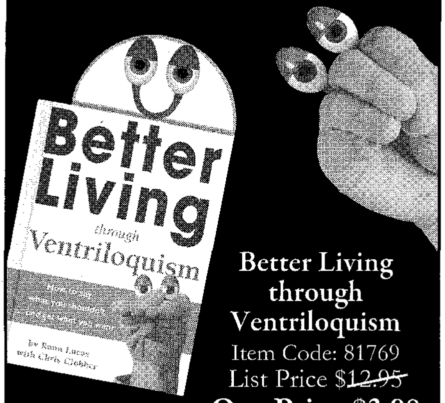
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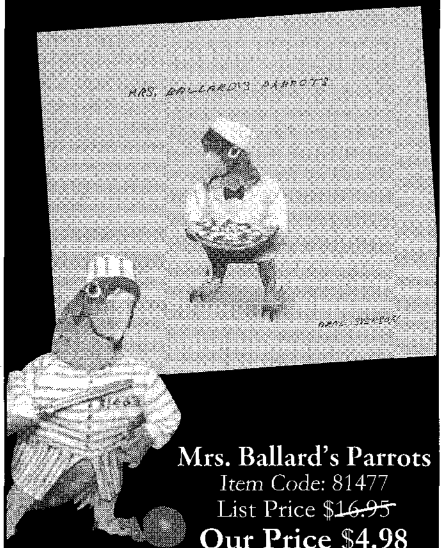

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Source data: www.epa.gov/greenvehicles and www.AutodataSolutions.com

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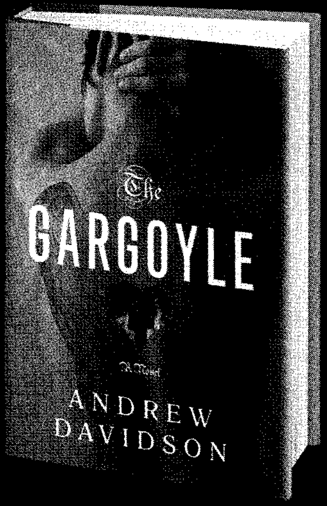

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CONTRIBUTORS

David Grann ("The Chameleon," p. 66), a staff writer, will publish his first book, "The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon," in February.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 27) writes regularly about the environment. She is the co-editor, with Francis Spufford, of "The Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and the Antarctic."

Lauren Collins (The Talk of the Town, p. 28) is the deputy editor of The Talk of the Town and a staff writer.

Anne Hull ("The Strawberry Girls," p. 36), a reporter at the Washington *Post*, received, with Dana Priest and Michel du Cille, the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service, for exposing the mistreatment of veterans at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, in Washington.

John Ashbery (Poem, p. 40) won the Griffin International Poetry Prize for "Notes from the Air: Selected Later Poems." Volume I of his collected poems is due out in the fall.

Bruce McCall (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 45; Illustration, p. 47) will publish his first children's book, "Marveltown," next month.

Jerome Groopman ("Superbugs," p. 46) is the Recanati Professor at Harvard. His book "How Doctors Think" is out in paperback.

Peter Hessler ("Running to Beijing," p. 56), the author of "Oracle Bones," is working on "Country Driving," a book about the impact of the automobile in China.

Matthew Dickman (Poem, p. 60), whose work has appeared in *Tin House* and *The American Poetry Review*, has a début collection, "All American Poem," coming out in September. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Joshua Ferris (Fiction, p. 80) was the recipient of the 2008 Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award for his first novel, "Then We Came to the End."

Nicholas Lemann (A Critic at Large, p. 86), the dean of the Columbia School of Journalism, has been writing for the magazine since 1999.

Nancy Franklin (On Television, p. 94) is the magazine's television critic.

J. J. Sempé (Cover) has been a contributor to the magazine since 1978. "Sempé: A Little Bit of France" came out in January.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

Ask the Author: *Elizabeth Kolbert* answers readers' questions about energy and the environment. / Audio: *David Grann* talks about Frédéric Bourdin. / *Jeffrey Eugenides* reads a Harold Brodkey story. / Photographs of the Strawberry Court, by *Brian Finke*. / The Campaign Trail podcast. / The Book Bench, the Cartoon Lounge, and Goings On, plus blogs by *Hendrik Hertzberg*, *George Packer*, *Dana Goodyear*, and *Sasha Frere-Jones*. / The Naked Campaign videos, featuring *Steve Brodner*. / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a list of *New Yorker* events.

THE MAIL

MAKING MUSIC

Alex Ross, in his article on symphonic music in China, notes that "China's music-education system may yield notable soloists, but it has yet to develop the breadth of talent and the collaborative mentality that engender great orchestras" ("Symphony of Millions," July 7th & 14th). The United States found itself in a similar place a hundred years ago, and its solution was simple: import great conductors. American orchestras were built by charismatic European conductors, such as George Szell, Leopold Stokowski, Pierre Monteux, Charles Munch, Fritz Reiner, and Arturo Toscanini. Given the resources that China is willing to spend on music, it is surprising that when a conductor like Riccardo Muti resigned from his post at La Scala an ensemble like the Shanghai Opera House did not rush to make him an offer he couldn't refuse.

Seth Levi
Philadelphia, Pa.

POLITICAL BEGINNINGS

Ryan Lizza, in his description of how Chicago politics influenced Senator Barack Obama, brought back a lot of memories and angst about being an up-and-coming youngster in a world that stands firmly on tradition and cronyism ("Making It," July 21st). It does not surprise me that some of those who helped Obama in his initial forays into politics came to resent his meteoric ascendancy. It is a condition that always accompanies the young who want to challenge the status quo and to make dramatic changes; and it is a phenomenon that many either fail to consider or to understand. I witnessed the same tendency in the banking world in the early nineteen-seventies as a young woman who had ambitious aspirations and encountered many who thought I should bide my time. Was I an opportunist? You bet! And so was every other woman or person of color who succeeded in a world where previously they "knew their place," and it was not at the top. Obama touts talking with foes as well as with friends, and compromising to gain the greater good, as central to his candidacy, and his politics reflect that.

Deb Talbot
Tampa, Fla.

Lizza's in-depth and informative article about Obama's rise in Chicago politics provides a clear picture of a very talented and focussed politician who adeptly used the system to move forward. One can only wonder what effect such an article might have had six months ago on those who have idealized him. Obama's race and personal history make him anything but a conventional Presidential candidate, and his current campaign has been based to a large degree on the idea that he is not a conventional politician. But, if Lizza teaches us anything, it is just how conventional Obama's ambition and tactics have been.

Malka Leiter
Brighton, Mass.

CHESTERTON'S RELIGION

I greatly enjoyed Adam Gopnik's article about G. K. Chesterton, but I am surprised at his interpretation of Chesterton's Catholicism ("The Back of the World," July 7th & 14th). The practical result of Chesterton's religion—the application of it—can be found in his book "Eugenics and Other Evils" (1922). No other intellectual of the era denounced racial theory and planning as Chesterton did in that book. When Margaret Sanger and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., were defending forced sterilization to protect gene pools, a solution to mankind's problems of the sort that the Nazis made infamous, his was one of the very few voices of dissent.

Lawrence Dugan
Philadelphia, Pa.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
FRINGE BENEFITS

Each year, the Off-Off Broadway theatre world celebrates itself with the New York International Fringe Festival. More than two hundred works of theatre and dance descend upon twenty downtown venues over the next two weeks. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE
DUELLING GUITARS

The Lincoln Center Out of Doors festival presents the world première of “A Crimson Grail (2008) for 200 Electric Guitars (Outdoor Version),” by the avant-garde composer and rock musician Rhys Chatham. The piece, which features two hundred guitar players lining Damrosch Park, is on a bill that also includes the U.S. première of the guitarist Manuel Göttsching’s influential “E2-E4,” from 1981. It will be accompanied by the Joshua Light Show. (See page 10.)

ART
VIEW WITH A ROOM

Long before there were upscale shelter mags, there were homeowners eager to show off their digs. “House Proud: Nineteenth Century Watercolor Interiors from the Thaw Collection,” at the Cooper-Hewitt, presents some seventy watercolor drawings, commissioned by the royalty and bourgeoisie of England, Europe, and Russia, exhibited alongside textiles, ceramics, and other furnishings. (See page 12.)

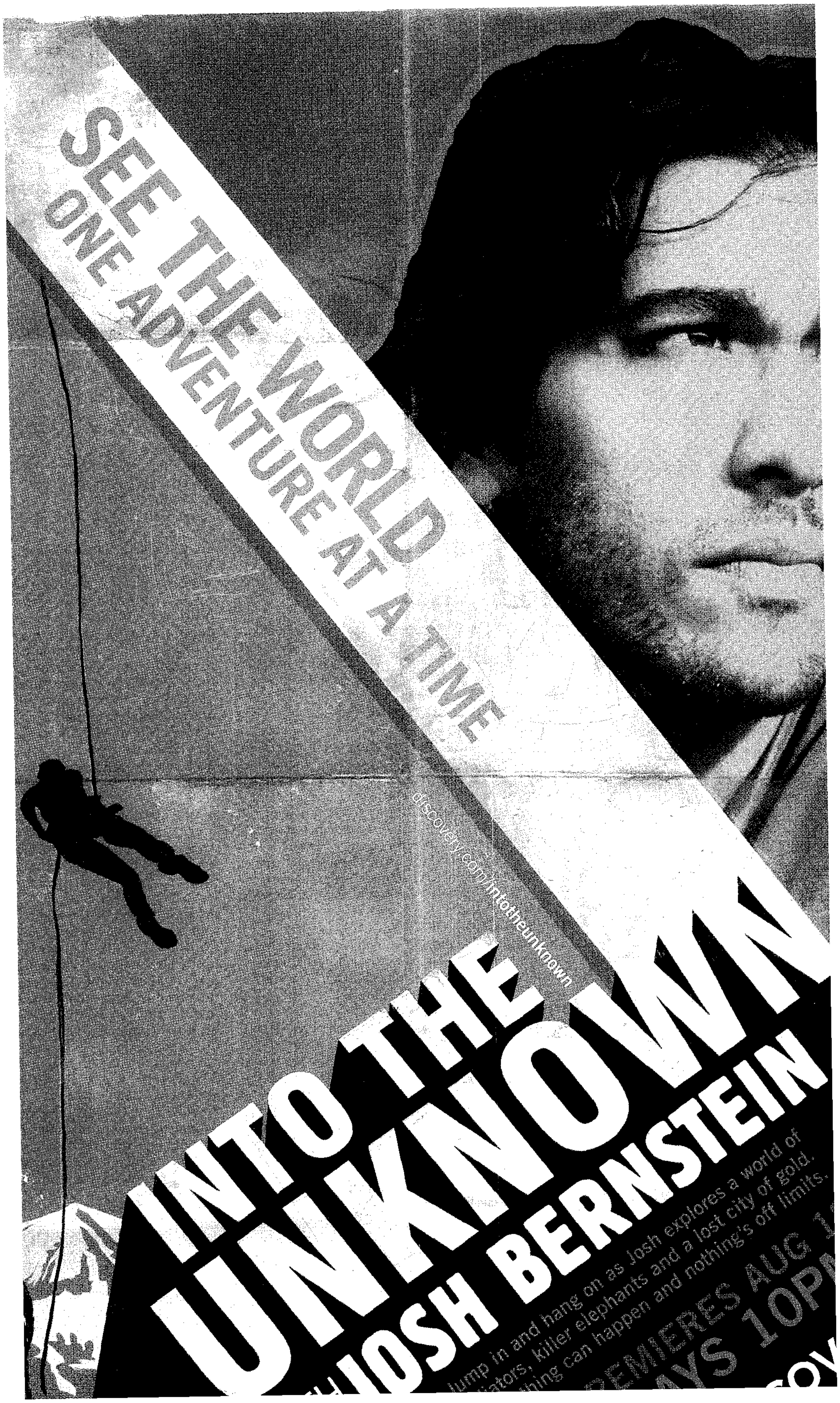
CLASSICAL MUSIC
HAMPTONS HIGH

The flutist Marya Martin, the director of the Bridgehampton Chamber Music Festival, has an artful way of slipping new music into an audience-friendly series. The next two weeks feature works by such composers as Arvo Pärt, Huang Ruo, and Kaija Saariaho. (See page 18.)

MOVIES
INDIE AND PENDANTS

BAM offers a sneak preview of Azazel Jacobs’s “Momma’s Man,” opening later in August, along with Jacobs’s first two features, “Nobody Needs to Know” and “The GoodTimesKid,” and two films chosen by the director: “Rude Boy,” featuring the Clash, and Aki Kaurismäki’s “La Vie de Bohème.” (See page 23.)

Crowds at Central Park SummerStage. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.



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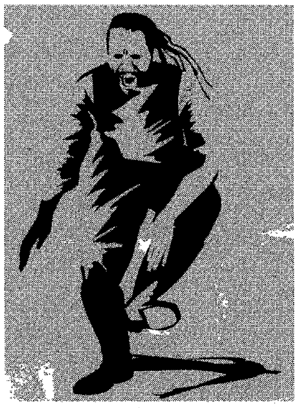
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
FIRE AND ICE

The dance form known as stepping was invented by fraternities at black colleges around the nineteen-twenties. The students did these drills, presumably as a show of both power and togetherness, at initiation ceremonies. Eventually, stepping moved into the quad, where the houses started holding competitions, each trying to prove that it was the coolest. Then the competitions went public. (See the 2007 movie "Stomp the Yard.") In its classic form, stepping looks like a cross between a military parade (tightly synchronized unison work) and African dance: syncopation, clapping, body patting, footwork like there's no tomorrow. Step Afrika!, which claims to be the first professional stepping company—it was founded by C. Brian Williams (Alpha Phi Alpha, Howard University, same house as Martin Luther King, Jr.) in 1994—will perform on Aug. 16, first in an afternoon "family" program, then in a regular evening show, as part of Lincoln Center Out of Doors. Outdoors is a good place for stepping, because this is a noisy art.



—*Joan Acocella*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

A DAY IN DIG NATION
Michael McQuilken wrote (with Tommy Smith) and performs this one-man show, about the pitfalls of a technology-driven society. Opens Aug. 13. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs a new musical about the Nigerian composer, performer, and political activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones and additional lyrics by Lewis. Kuti's music will be performed by Antibalas. In previews. (37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-560-8912.)

THE FIRST BREEZE OF SUMMER
Signature Theatre Company presents Leslie Lee's drama from 1975, about three generations of a Southern family. Ruben Santiago-Hudson directs; Leslie Uggams stars. In previews. (555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE ROCK MUSICAL
Diane Paulus directs a cast of twenty-seven, led by Jonathan Groff ("Spring Awakening") and Will Swenson. In previews. Opens Aug. 7. (Delacorte Theatre, Central Park, near W. 81st St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-539-8750.)

HAMLET
Gorilla Rep presents a free production of the Shakespeare tragedy on the Cloisters Lawn at Fort Tryon Park. Opens Aug. 7. Christopher Carter Sanderson directs. (190th St. at Broadway. For more information, visit www.gorillarep.org.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL
More than two hundred companies perform shows in twenty venues across downtown Manhattan. Highlights include Patrick Huguenin's "Paper Dolls," Ryan Iverson and Scott Peterman's "Sailor Man," Molly Bell and Daya Curley's musical comedy "Becoming Britney," Tim Ryan Meinelschmidt's "Johnny Law, Courtroom Crusader," Rose Courtney's "Cycle," and Mark Brown's musical "China: The Whole Enchilada." Opens Aug. 8. (Various venues. 212-279-4488. For more information, visit www.fringenyc.org.)

THE SEDUCTION OF EDGAR DEGAS
The première of a play by Le Wilhelm, about Degas and his muse, the Parisian dancer Eugénie Fiocre. Previews begin Aug. 14. Opens Aug. 17. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

SPIEGELWORLD 2008
The Spiegeltent returns to South Street Seaport, featuring several shows, including the première of "Désir," as well as a new incarnation of last year's "Absinthe." Opens Aug. 6. (Pier 17. 212-279-4200.)

A TALE OF TWO CITIES
Jill Santoriello wrote the book, music, and lyrics to this musical adaptation of the classic Dickens novel. Warren Carlyle directs and choreographs. Previews begin Aug. 19. (Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

TWELFTH NIGHT
Pulse Ensemble Theatre presents a free production of the Shakespeare comedy at the Amphitheatre in Riverbank State Park. Alexa Kelly directs. Opens Aug. 7. (Enter at 145th St. at Riverside Dr. 212-695-1596.)

NOW PLAYING

AIN'T SUPPOSED TO DIE A NATURAL DEATH
Classical Theatre of Harlem presents Melvin Van Peebles's 1971 musical, about life in the ghetto, performed in various parks throughout the city. (For information and schedule, visit www.classicaltheatreofharlem.org. Through Aug. 16.)

ANIMALS OUT OF PAPER
Second Stage's Uptown Series concludes with this play by Rajiv Joseph, an origami-themed love story. Giovanna Sardelli directs. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 212-246-4422.)

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS
Five actors deftly portray more than thirty different characters in this enjoyable stage adaptation of Jules Verne's 1873 adventure novel about Phineas Fogg (Daniel Stewart), an English gentleman who attempts to circumnavigate the globe in less than three months. The playwright, Mark Brown, has done a polished if not entirely rigorous job with the adaptation, which moves well but can occasionally veer toward the cartoonish. The true wonder in this production lies somewhere between the clever, minimalist direction, by Michael Evan Hanley, and the live sound design, by David Andrew Levy, which together manage to evoke the story's many exotic settings with subtlety, economy, and verve—a riveting testament to the ingeniousness of the human imagination, truly in keeping with the spirit of Verne himself. (Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

BUFFALO GAL
Primary Stages opens its season with this play by A. R. Gurney, a comedy about a fading television star who returns to her home town of Buffalo to perform in "The Cherry Orchard." Mark Lamos directs. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

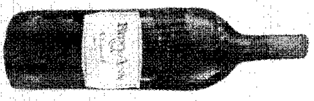
FLAMINGO COURT
Jamie Farr (of "M*A*S*H" fame) and Anita Gillette star in this trio of one-acts by Luigi Creatore, each set in a different condo in the same South Florida retirement community. A married woman's flirtations with a plucky bachelor are further complicated by the revelation that the bedridden husband she's been tending to for years doesn't actually exist. A man tries to convince his Alzheimer's-stricken wife to let him take her to a rest home. An elderly widower hires a hooker to thwart his greedy daughter's plans for a hefty inheritance. Unfortunately, none of these sketches are particularly remarkable—they are riddled with clichéd, melodramatic plot twists of the kind that characterize most sitcoms. Farr and Gillette do a fine job, but one presumes they are capable of better. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

MARIE ANTOINETTE: THE COLOR OF FLESH
It can't be easy to create a dramatic work about aristocrats in pre-Revolutionary France that avoids kitsch—the giant wigs, ornate dresses, bowing footmen, and masked balls all but preclude it—but Joel Gross's drama doesn't try hard enough. Centering on an imagined love triangle between Marie Antoinette (Amanda Jones), her sly portrait painter (Samantha Ives), and a count (Jonathan Kells Phillips) who starts out a cad and ends up a hero, the play explores the intimate connections among the three and offers a hint of insight into the forces that shaped the era. Unfortunately, the actors' breathy declaiming only heightens the artificiality of Gross's dialogue; even before intermission, we are hoping for the grim end to arrive. (St. Luke's, 308 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200.)

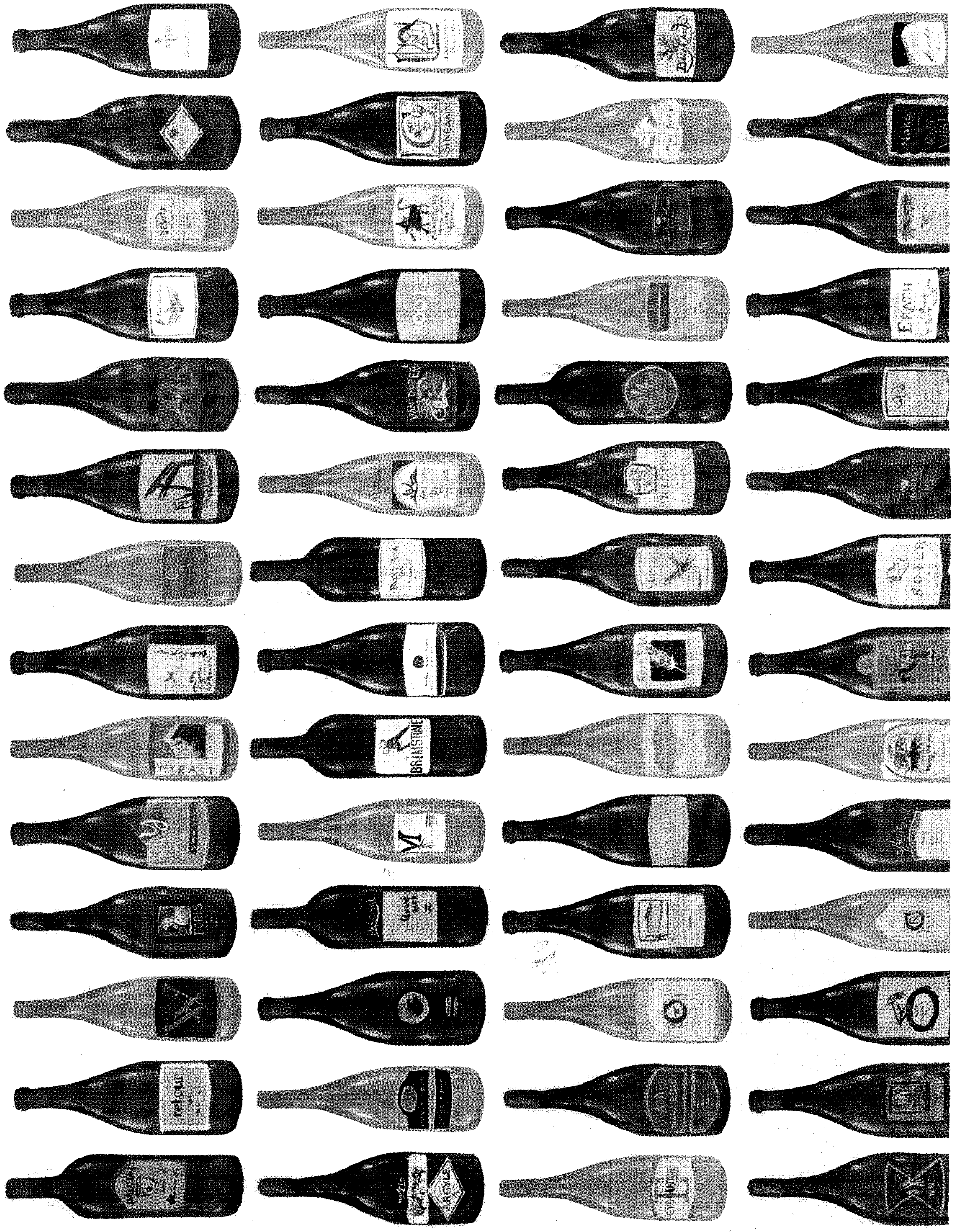
MISALLIANCE
New York Classical Theatre, which presents peripatetic productions in Central Park, puts on Shaw's play from 1909, a satire of marriage, involving the daughter of a wealthy underwear manufacturer. (Enter at Central Park W. at W. 103rd St. 212-252-4531.)

[TITLE OF SHOW]
A meta-musical about two guys trying to write a musical may sound suspect, but the result, with a book by Hunter Bell and music and lyrics by Jeff Bowen, who also star, turns out to be a joy from start to finish—original, clever, and surprisingly moving. Bell and Bowen, joined by their actress friends (and now co-stars) Susan Blackwell and Heidi Blickenstaff, create a musical in three weeks and submit it to a festival; brainstorming sessions, foulmouthed pep talks, jokes about drag-queen names and Broadway flops, and an in-song argument about whether "sweeter" rhymes with "theatre" all make it into the show, as does each new chapter in its progression from idea to possible hit. That we know the ending—we're watching it on Broadway—only heightens the fun. (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

ULLA PUGGAARD



Everybody sing along:


ROOTS
ERATH
VAN DUZER
SOTER
WYEAST
BRIMSTONE
retour
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Scott Paul
ROCO
APOLLONI
bigfire
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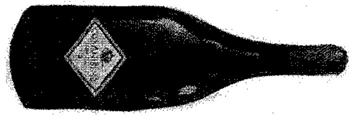
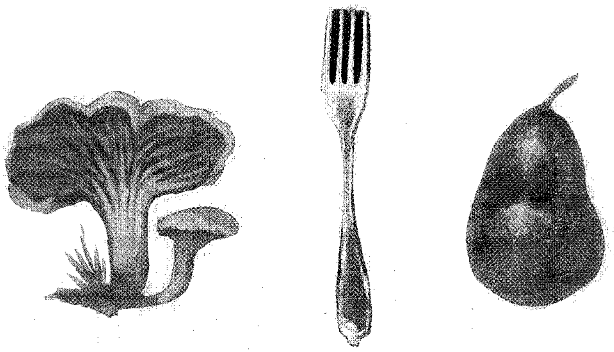


"Ninety-nine bottles of wine on the wall…"

OREGON BOUNTY



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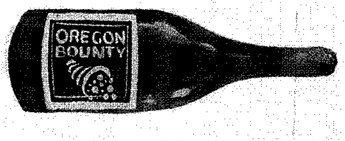


OCT 1 – NOV 30 2008

OUT OF TOWN

BARD SUMMERSCAPE
Will Pomerantz directs and choreographs the George and Ira Gershwin musical "Of Thee I Sing," which has a book by George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, through Aug. 10. James Bagwell conducts. The Spiegeltent closes Aug. 17. (Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900.)

BAY STREET THEATRE
Marcia Milgrom Dodge directs "Ain't Misbehavin'," the Fats Waller musical revue by Murray Horwitz and Richard Maltby, Jr. For more information, visit www.baystreet.org. (Sag Harbor, N.Y. 631-725-9500.)

BERKSHIRE THEATRE FESTIVAL
At the Unicorn, Anders Cato directs Beckett's 1953 masterwork, "Waiting for Godot." On the Main Stage, Richard Corley directs "A Man for All Seasons," Robert Bolt's drama about Sir Thomas More, through Aug. 9. "Noël Coward in Two Keys," Coward's final play, begins performances Aug. 12. For more information, visit www.berkshiretheatre.org. (Stockbridge, Mass. 413-298-5576.)

DOUBLE EDGE THEATRE
The company presents "The Illustrious Return of Don Quixote," an adaptation of Cervantes's novel that includes puppets, stilts, and scenes both indoors and outside. (948 Conway Rd., Ashfield, Mass. 413-628-0277.)

HUDSON VALLEY SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL
"Cymbeline," directed by Terrence O'Brien, plays on the tented outdoor stage at Boscobel, in repertory with "Twelfth Night" and "The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged)." For more information, visit www.hvshakespeare.org. (Garrison, N.Y. 845-265-9575.)

WILLIAMSTOWN THEATRE FESTIVAL
On the Nikos Stage through Aug. 17, Carolyn Cantor directs Ellen Melaver's play "Not Waving," with a cast that includes Nate Corddry, Maria Dizzia, and Will Rogers. On the Main Stage, John Rando directs George Feydeau's farce "A Flea in Her Ear," rewritten by David Ives, through Aug. 10. Beginning Aug. 13, Joseph Hardy directs "Home," a drama by David Storey, starring Richard Easton and Dana Ivey. For a full schedule, visit www.wtfestival.org. (Williamstown, Mass. 413-597-3400.)

Also Playing

ARIAS WITH A TWIST: HERE Arts Center, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 212-352-3101. **AUGUST: OSAGE COUNTY:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BOEING-BOEING:** Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 17. **CIRQUE DREAMS "JUNGLE FANTASY":** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200. **EAST 14TH:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **GYPSY:** St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **KICKING A DEAD HORSE:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Through Aug. 10. **LEGALLY BLONDE THE MUSICAL:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 212-307-4100. **LIFE IN A MARITAL INSTITUTION:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 212-691-1555. **THE LION KING:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4747. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **THE MARRIAGE OF BETTE AND BOO:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **SOUTH PACIFIC:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 39 STEPS:** Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **THURGOOD:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Aug. 17. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100. **XANADU:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ALL POINTS WEST MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL
Liberty State Park, N.J. (212-307-7171)—This new gathering attempts to bring a Coachella-like vibe to the metropolitan area. **Radiohead** is one of the headliners (the other is **Jack Johnson**, who doesn't have the critical acclaim of that British band but is still a powerful draw). There are some forty other acts, including **Underworld, Kings of Leon, Rodrigo y Gabriela, Cat Power,** the **Roots,** and the **New Pornographers.** (Aug. 8-10. For more information, visit www.apwfestival.com.)

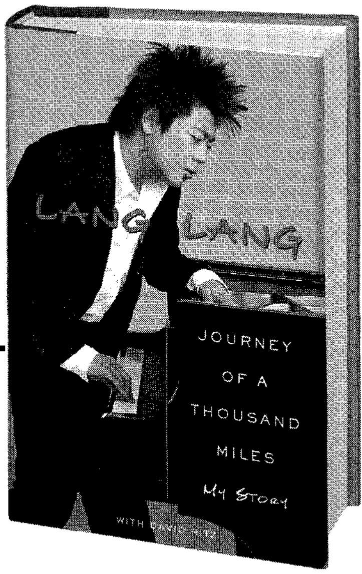
BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Aug. 7: **Tift Merritt** arrived in 2002 with an album of promising alt-country, "Bramble Rose," and then two years later went on to cut "Tambourine," a widely praised collection of soul-tinged rock. She parted ways with her record label after "Tambourine" and reportedly became disenchanted with music. She retreated to Paris, where she wrote a new batch of songs, which are personal and emotional; they appear on her latest release, "Another Country." Aug. 14: An evening of low-end bombast as the grunge veterans the **Melvins** return to New York. Though the group has inspired countless bands with similar inclinations, the sonically brutal Washington act has outlived many of them. More than two decades after their inception, the Melvins are promoting a new album, "Nude with Boots," which features contributions from this evening's opening act, **Big Business.**

CELEBRATE BROOKLYN!
Prospect Park Band Shell, Prospect Park W. at 9th St. (718-855-7882, ext. 45)—Aug. 8: **Lila Downs,** whose mother was a Mixtec singer from Mexico and whose father was an American academic, has studied opera and anthropology, and her music addresses feminism, civil rights, and the plight of Mexican immigrants. With the **Villa-Lobos Brothers** and **Grupo Norteño.** Aug. 9: A tribute to Bill Withers, the former child stutterer turned airplane-assembly-line worker, who, as a middle-aged man, quit working nine to five for a career in music, with spectacular results ("Ain't No Sunshine," "Lovely Day," "Use Me," "Lean on Me"). The performers include **Angélique Kidjo, Nona Hendryx,** the **Swell Season** (Glen Hansard and Marketa Irglova), **Corey Glover, James (Blood) Ulmer, Sandra St. Victor,** and **Teddy Thompson.**

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. (212-360-2777)—Aug. 9: An afternoon of sounds from (more or less) south of the border, as the Mexican electronic-rock band **Kinky** is joined by the charred-voiced Texan rocker **Alejandro Escovedo** (who will be backed by a string section as he performs songs from his new solo release, "Real Animal") and the local, accordion-driven rock-*en-español* group **Pistolera.** Aug. 17: The soulful vocals of **Sharon Jones & the Dap-Kings.**

FILLMORE NEW YORK AT IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Aug. 13-17: **Rancid.** The beloved stalwarts of the hardcore community haven't released an album of new material in five years, but they're on the road in an effort to keep the fighting spirit of 1977 alive.

JALOPY THEATRE
315 Columbia St., Red Hook, Brooklyn (718-395-3214)—Aug. 17: The country-blues singer, songwriter, and barrelhouse guitarist **Spider John Koerner**—one-third of the obscure yet legendary sixties folk trio Koerner, Ray, & Glover—has been performing in the bars and folk clubs of the Twin Cities ever since Bob Dylan was enrolled at the



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University of Minnesota (he was one of the first to turn Dylan on to folk music). Bonnie Raitt covered one of Koerner's songs on her début album, and his fans have included John Lennon and David Bowie. His influence on twentieth-century music aside, watching Koerner perform might be the closest you can get to understanding how, more than eighty years ago, Charley Patton alone on guitar kept a roomful of people dancing and partying until the sun came up.

JONES BEACH THEATRE
Wantagh, N.Y. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 9: The British prog-rock institution **Jethro Tull** is fronted by Ian Anderson, the only flutist to have ever received a Grammy in the category of Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance (which he did in 1988, beating out, of all groups, Metallica). Their fellow classic-rock compatriot **Peter Frampton** joins them here. Aug. 10: **Judas Priest** teams up with **Heaven & Hell** (which is essentially the mid-eighties incarnation of Black Sabbath, with the vocalist Ronnie James Dio replacing Ozzy Osbourne) for an evening of heavy-metal thunder. In what just might make this the heavy-rock event of a lifetime, they'll be joined by the iconic **Motörhead** and the vintage thrash purveyors **Testament.** Aug. 14: The high-registered singer Steve Perry may no longer contribute to **Journey,** but the arena-rock favorites refuse to let that stop them. Arnel Pineda, an eerie vocal doppelgänger of Perry, has the microphone. Adding to the air of nostalgia, **Heart** and **Cheap Trick** will also perform.

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
The free annual festival of culture gets under way on Aug. 7 when the French guitarist **Stephane Wrembel** picks up where Django Reinhardt left off. With **Soledad Barrio** and **Noche Flamenca** (see Dance). Aug. 13: A tribute to the great jazz and pop producer Joel Dorn, who died late last year, with **Dr. John, Roberta Flack, Les McCann, Mocean Worker** (who is his son Adam Dorn), **Jane Monheit, Janis Siegel,** and others. Aug. 15: A survey of eight hundred years of minimalism, with the new early-music vocal ensemble **Beata Viscera** performing thirteenth-century music by Pérotin, **Rhys Chatham** presenting the world première of "A Crimson Grail (2008) for 200 Electric Guitars (Outdoor Version)," and **Manuel Göttsching** presenting the U.S. première of his influential instrumental album "E2-E4," accompanied by the visual pyrotechnics of the **Joshua Light Show.** (For more information, visit www.lincolncenter.org. Through Aug. 24.)

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Aug. 14-17: Led by the bookishly meticulous guitarist Robert Fripp, **King Crimson** continues to make complex, ambitious music without the slightest whiff of compromise.

TERMINAL 5
610 W. 56th St. (212-582-6600)—Aug. 8: Since getting back together a few years ago, to the incredulous delight of many, **Iggy & the Stooges** have put most of their punk acolytes to shame by being able to deliver the goods, even at this late date, in an inimitably insouciant fashion. Iggy Pop remains as elastic and dangerous as he was in the band's notorious early-seventies heyday, and, though the drummer Scott (Rock Action) Asheton and the guitarist Ron Asheton may appear fatter and grayer, the Stooges (with the feral, fraternal combination fleshed out by the Minutemen founder, Mike Watt, on bass) sound as sharp as ever.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BARGEMUSIC
Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn (718-624-2083)—Aug. 14: **Randy Sandke,** a trumpeter who blends the traditional and the progressive in his work, is joined by the bassist **Nicki Parrott** and the pianist **Ted Rosenthal.**

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Aug. 6-9: At ninety, the pianist **Hank Jones** plays with the same taste, confidence, and wit that have individualized his improvising for decades. He's joined by a pair of familiar associates, the bassist **George Mraz** and the drummer **Lewis Nash.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Aug. 5-10: **Earl Klugh,** the smooth-jazz monarch of the acoustic guitar. Aug. 12-17: The trombonist **Conrad Herwig** has applied a Latin-jazz sensibility to the music of Coltrane, Miles, and Shorter, and now he gives Herbie Hancock the same treatment. Considering that Hancock has flirted with the genre since 1962's "Watermelon Man," the transformation isn't particularly audacious. The pianist **Eddie Palmieri** and the trumpeter **Randy Brecker** join him here.

CENTRAL PARK SUMMERSTAGE
Aug. 6: Only a handful of jazz legends are still alive, working steadily, and playing at the top of their form. The tenor saxophonist **Sonny Rollins** is one of the chosen few. This is a benefit concert.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Aug. 5-10: A hard-bop pianist and composer whose dependability never masks his undiminished flair, **Cedar Walton** welcomes the trombonist **Steve Turre** to his quintet. Aug. 11: The pianist **Elio Villafranca** gets pan-American support from a fellow Cuban émigré, the drummer **Dafnis Prieto,** and the saxophonist **Eric Alexander.** Aug. 12-17 and Aug. 19-24: **Trio da Paz,** with the guests **Harry Allen** on saxophone, **Joe Locke** on vibraphone, and **Maucha Adnet** on vocals, salutes the Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim and the saxophone titan Stan Getz, whose collaboration in the sixties brought bossa nova international recognition.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Aug. 7-10: The resourceful pianist **Cyrus Chestnut** and his trio. Aug. 14-17: The gifted and influential trumpeter Lee Morgan, who was only thirty-three when he was shot dead at a New York jazz club, in 1972, would have been seventy this year. A revolving cast of former sidemen and admirers, including the saxophonists **Bennie Maupin** and **Billy Harper,** celebrates his truncated yet fruitful career. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—A week of Latin-jazz big bands kicks off with the full-throttle ensemble of drummer **Bobby Sanabria** (Aug. 5-6), followed, on Aug. 7-10, by the seasoned **Arturo O'Farrill Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra.** Aug. 12-14: The **Ron Miles** quartet. Miles, a lyrical trumpeter and frequent associate of the guitarist **Bill Frisell,** is joined by Frisell. The bassist **Reginald Veal** and the drummer **Matt Wilson** round out a quartet that's redolent with promise.

RIVER TO RIVER FESTIVAL
Aug. 7: The imposing trumpeter **Terence Blanchard,** a native of New Orleans, displayed uncommonly compelling emotive powers on his most recent album, "A Tale of God's Will (A Requiem for Katrina)," from 2007. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park. For more information, visit www.rivertorivernyc.com.)

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—Aug. 9: The Argentine composer **Guillermo Klein** brings in a scaled-down version of his critically acclaimed big band. The saxophonist **Steve Wilson's** group follows. Aug. 14: Another worthy double bill as the pianist **Ehud Asherie** plays duets with the guitarist **Howard Alden.** After that, another fine piano stylist, **Kevin Hays,** presents his trio with the drummer **Bill Stewart.**

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Aug. 5-10: A **Greg Osby** engagement typically offers twin pleasures—listening to his tart, exploratory saxophone improvisations and discovering the latest set of promising players that stock his current band. Aug. 12-17: The singer **Rebecca Martin** and her quartet, which includes the guitarist **Kurt Rosenwinkel** and the drummer **Brian Blade.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

JOHN RITTER

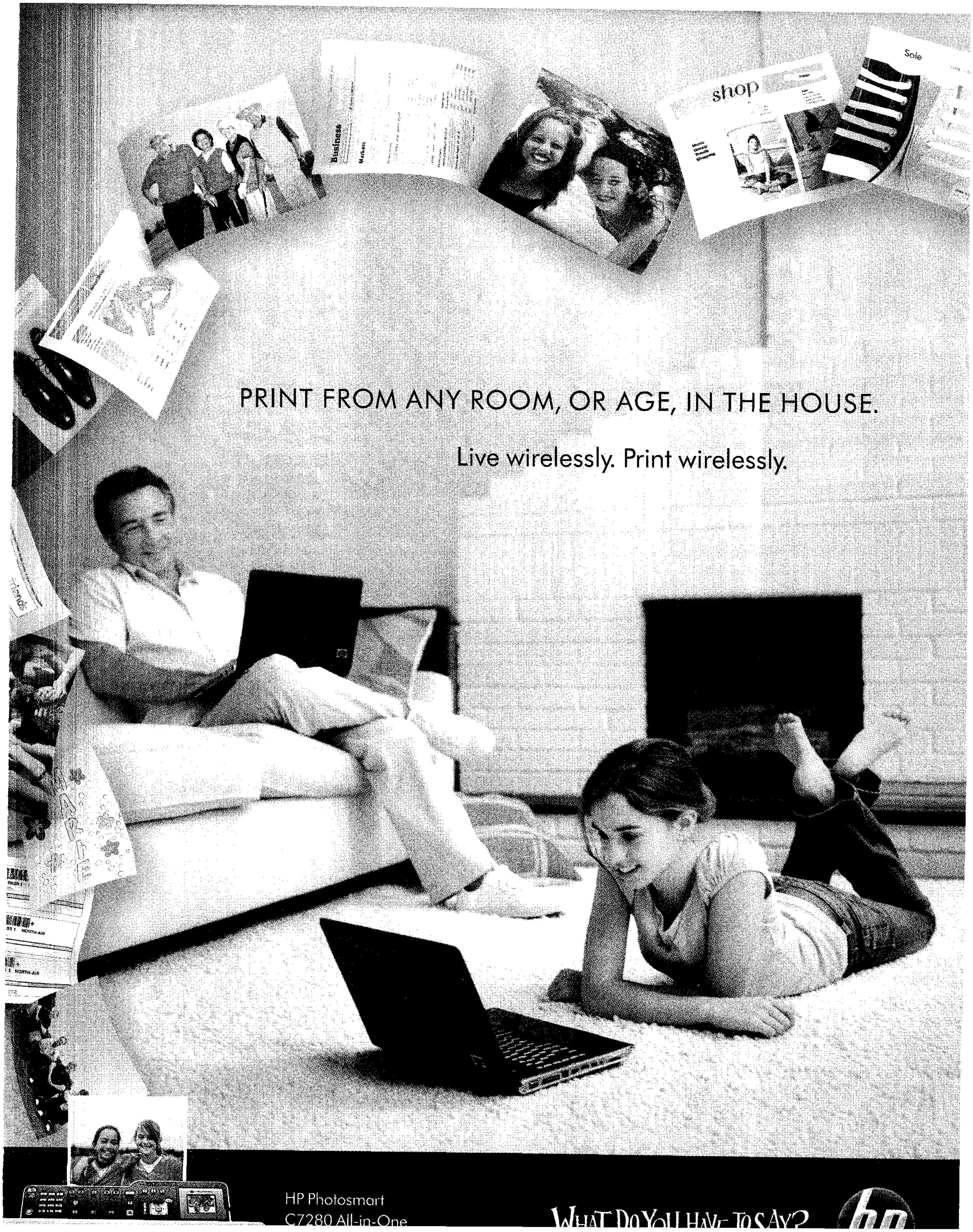
DVD NOTES
FRENCH DISCONNECTIONS

In his last theatrical comedy, "**Trafic**" (Criterion), from 1971, the French director Jacques Tati, in his familiar role of Monsieur Hulot, plays the designer of the "camping car," a Rube Goldbergesque contraption that offers such odd amenities as a radiator grille that flips out to become a barbecue grill.

The story, about a French automaker's delegation en route to a car show in Amsterdam, evokes Tati's constant themes—the confrontation of easygoing tradition and fast-paced technological modernity, and the uneasy intermingling of world cultures through travel and trade—but invests them with a new bitterness. (The cross-cultural confusion is heightened by overzealous Dutch customs inspectors and a twittering American P.R. woman.) Filming on location, Tati depicts highways as open wounds in flowering fields and stages a long, brutal chain reaction of car accidents. He ends the film with an agonizing gridlock punctuated by a stream of black umbrellas, as if holding a funeral for himself. Yet he is nonetheless transfixed by the sleek visual sublimity of modern life, watching highway lines and their kaleidoscopic reflections in sheet metal flow by with a quasi-metaphysical perfection.

Tati's children, Sophie and Pierre, worked as assistants on the last film of another independent giant of the French cinema, Jean-Pierre Melville, "**Un Flic,**" from 1972 (literally "A Cop," here released as "Dirty Money," by Lionsgate). Melville, who based most of his work on American gangster movies, casts Alain Delon as a police detective who, for reasons both professional and personal, is pursuing a bank robber (Richard Crenna). The cold restraint with which Melville films the opening bank robbery and the central heist (which takes place on a speeding train) suggests emotion with an exquisite subtlety that borders on hysterical repression—and Delon, with his ice-blue eyes and mask-like stillness, serves the director's purposes perfectly, as does Catherine Deneuve, who, as a platinum princess playing on both sides of the law, gives away nothing, either to her two men or to the camera. Melville's vision of modern-day corruption, which he kept in check under the regime of Charles de Gaulle (whom Melville had served in the French Resistance), was evidently liberated by de Gaulle's death, in 1970; here, Melville's chilly manner turns sardonic as he vents pent-up bile.

—Richard Brody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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HUE TURN

At a time when museums, galleries, and collectors' homes are full of massive color prints by Andreas Gursky, Cindy Sherman, and Thomas Ruff, the idea that color photographs were once not just unfashionable but unsalable seems impossibly quaint. "When Color Was New," a smart, compact show at the Julie Saul gallery, puts things in perspective. Its focus is work from the nineteen-seventies, when Jan Groover, Joel Sternfeld, Mitch Epstein, Joel Meyerowitz, and others were challenging the notion that color was vulgar and commercial. Pictures by Paul Outerbridge and Harry Callahan set historic precedents, while others, from the eighties, by Nan Goldin and Boyd Webb, suggest color's subsequent and unstoppable surge to dominance. But the seventies were the turning point. If one photograph sums up the breakthrough, it's William Eggleston's worm's-eye view of a rusty tricycle on a Memphis street—the icon of his 1976 MOMA show, which cracked the black-and-white photography establishment. But Eggleston's trike has a context, and between Stephen Shore's frozen dinner, Martin Parr's fast-food counter, and Helen Levitt's vivid gaggle of runway-ready street urchins, this show provides it.

—Vince Aletti

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"J.M.W. Turner."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ As Renaissance Florence and Rome rediscovered classical art, a penchant developed for inlay and carving of semi-precious hard stone (*pietre dure*, in Italian). The craze swept neighboring countries, and **"Art of the Royal Court: Treasures in Pietre Dure from the Palaces of Europe"** is brimming with magnificent objects in jasper, agate, chalcedony, lapis, and rock crystal. Geometrically inlaid tabletops, cameos, and caskets aren't the half of it. There's the nearly life-size—and dazzlingly lifelike—bust of Cosimo III de' Medici's mother Vittoria della Rovere, made circa 1697. There's the do-it-yourself mood ring, made for Philipp Karl, Archbishop of Mainz, around 1730, which allowed him to snap different-colored gems into the setting. The "Stroganov Tazza," carved in 1809, a massive basin in green malachite, qualifies, rightly, as a Russian National Treasure. Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Medieval and Renaissance Treasures from the Victoria and Albert Museum."** Through Aug. 17. ♦ **"Framing a Century: Master Photographs, 1840-1940."** Through Sept. 1. ♦ **"Jeff Koons on the Roof."** Through Oct. 26. ♦ **"Early Buddhist Manuscript Painting: The Palm-Leaf Tradition."** Through March 22, 2009. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Dalí: Painting and Film."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"Bernd and Hilla Becher: Landscape/Topology."** Through Aug. 25. ♦ **"Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling."** Through Oct. 20. ♦ **"Pipe, Glass, Bottle of Rum: The Art of Appropriation."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"Kirchner and the Berlin Street."** Through Nov. 10. ♦ **"Wunderkammer: A Century of Curiosities."** Through Nov. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Louise Bourgeois."** Through Sept. 28. ♦ **"Imageless: The Scientific Study and Experimental Treatment of an Ad Reinhardt Black Painting."** Through Sept. 14. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Buckminster Fuller: Starting with the Universe."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Paul McCarthy: Central Symmetrical Rotation Movement Three Installations, Two Films."** Through Oct. 12. ♦ **"Polaroids: Mapplethorpe."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Ghada Amer: Love Has No End."** Through Oct. 19. ♦ **"Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition."** Through Aug. 10. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"The Horse."** Through Jan. 4, 2009. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 91st St. (212-849-8300)—**"House Proud: Nineteenth Century Watercolor Interiors from the Thaw Collection."** Opens Aug. 12. (Open Mondays through Thursdays, 10 to 5, Fridays, 10 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, noon to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Frick's Vermeers Reunited."** Through Nov. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan."** Through Sept. 7. ♦ **"Bill Wood's Business."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and weekends, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Action/Abstraction: Pollock, de Kooning, and American Art, 1940-1976."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered."** Through Aug. 13. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 11 to 5:45, and Thursdays, 11 to 8.)

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"Philip Guston: Works on Paper."** Through Aug. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NATIONAL ACADEMY MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-369-4880)—**"The 183rd Annual."** Through Sept. 7. (Open Wednesdays and Thursdays, noon to 5, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6.)

NEW MUSEUM
235 Bowery, at Prince St. (212-219-1222)—**"After Nature."** Through Sept. 21. ♦ **"Altoids Award: Ei Arakawa, Lauren Kelley, Michael Patterson-Carver, and Michael Stickrod."** Through Oct. 12. (Open Wednesdays and weekends, noon to 6, and Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 10.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"If Elected: The Game of American Politics."** Through Jan. 6, 2009. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Olafur Eliasson."** Through Aug. 31. ♦ **"Arctic Hysteria: New Art from Finland."** Through Sept. 15. ♦ **"James Turrell's Meeting."** The artist's "skyspace" installation will be open at sunset on Saturdays. Through Sept. 6. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"Kehinde Wiley—The World Stage: Africa, Lagos ~ Dakar."** Wiley's classical, realist paintings aren't very innovative, but his subject—young black men—is. In this series, Wiley shifts his focus from inner-city America to urban Africa, specifically Lagos and Dakar. His favorite gimmick persists, however, as sitters mimic the poses of preëxisting art objects, in this case, local public sculptures. Where the paintings really sing is in their use of pattern. Like a latter-day Matisse, Wiley treats passages of his paintings like swatches of textiles, juxtaposing color-clashing foregrounds and backgrounds and, in some cases, playfully merging them. Through Oct. 26. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

EDWARD HOPPER
It's possible to see in these thirteen etchings, created in the late teens and early nineteen-twenties, near the beginning of Hopper's career, shades of the painter he would become—obsessed with compositional precision and urban ennui. Several pieces look back to earlier masters and establish Hopper's influences. "Evening Wind," a scene of a girl startled by a flapping curtain, recalls Edvard Munch, while the flat "American Landscape," in which a couple of cows blunder through the middle foreground, conjures the dour realism of painters like Courbet and Bonheur. But Hopper's signature stark and gothic approach is apparent in such works as "Night Shadows" and "The Lonely House," as isolated architectural elements suggest surrogates for alienated figures. Through Aug. 15. (Starr, 5 E. 73rd St. 212-570-1739.)

"SIDE BY SIDE"
If the affinity between Henri Cartier-Bresson and Helen Levitt is a little too obvious, this show is still full of inspired pairings and wonderful pictures. Both photographers were drawn to the theatre of the street, and that public stage is the set-

HARRY CALLAHAN, "CHICAGO" (CA. 1952)/© ESTATE OF HARRY CALLAHAN/COURTESY PACE/MACGILL GALLERY, N.Y.

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ting for a lot of the work here, much of it involving children at play. Levitt's familiar image of three tots in Halloween masks posing with nonchalant elegance on a stoop in Spanish Harlem is juxtaposed with Cartier-Bresson's picture of three men in more grownup disguise on the steps of a courthouse near Manhattan's City Hall. Through Aug. 14. (Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930.)

Short List

LARRY FINK: Pace/MacGill, 32 E. 57th St. 212-759-7999. Through Aug. 15. **"THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS":** The Project, 37 W. 57th St. 212-688-1585. Through Aug. 15. **"QUIET POLITICS":** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through Aug. 29.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

JAMES MOLLISON
The exhibition combines two series of photographs: closeup head shots of apes and friezelike lineups of concert-going fans. Mollison's humans are so devoted to their chosen performer (Bob Dylan, Rod Stewart, Jimmy Buffett, Marilyn Manson) that they could be their stunt doubles; some groups suggest freakish tribes, others just look like comic clones. Perhaps because they stare out at the viewer with such intensely direct gazes, Mollison's chimps, gorillas, orangutans, and other primates are far more compelling and sympathetic. The comparison is unfair, of course, but, then, so *is* evolution. Through Aug. 16. (Hasted Hunt, 529 W. 20th St. 212-627-0006.)

ASAKO NARAHASHI
Narahashi, whose work is included in the I.C.P.'s current survey of contemporary Japanese photography, "Heavy Light," makes her U.S. solo début with this show of large-scale color landscapes. Actually, land takes up only a small portion of these pictures, all of which were shot while the photographer was bobbing in the ocean and facing the shore. Rising swells of water, some spitting drops on her lens, occupy most of the frame and leave only a partial, smudged view of the buildings, bridges, or flowering cherry trees in the distance. Representation nearly drowns in abstraction, and this semi-submerged point of view couldn't be more welcome on a hot summer day. Through Aug. 22. (Milo, 525 W. 25th St. 212-414-0370.)

"PAINTING: NOW AND FOREVER, PART II"
A decade has passed since the two-part show "Painting: Now and Forever, Part I" appeared concurrently at the galleries of Matthew Marks and the late, legendary Pat Hearn. This sequel looks suitably cheeky at Greene Naftali, with Cosima von Bonin's lengths of wool, Mike Kelley's cheap carpet mounted on wood, and William Leavitt's oil on canvas accompanied by a potted plant, among other works. At Marks, the show looks a bit more sedate, as works by Mary Heilmann, Blinky Palermo, Jack Goldstein, Anne Truitt, and Atsuko Tanaka offer less irreverent approaches to painting. It's hard to say whether these efforts are buoyed or destabilized by the inclusion of the comic conceptualist Rodney Graham, whose series "Small Modernist Painting," rendered in a vaguely Abstract Expressionist vein, registers like a rim shot. Through Aug. 15. (Greene Naftali, 508 W. 26th St. 212-463-7770; Matthew Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

"THIS IS NOT ABOUT LANDSCAPE"
This three-person painting show touches on themes of suburban banality, stylized flatness, and formalist fantasia. It is also, the title notwithstanding, about landscape. Louise Belcourt's oils and gouaches reconfigure hedge and tree motifs into modernist modules. Mie Yim's visions are hotter: they center on moon and marshmallow faces, pocked with cherry eyes, that double as geographic formations in infernal deserts. Lighthearted and slightly old-fashioned, Sarah Brenneman's watercolors, which incorporate collage, investigate allover tree-of-life patterns that suggest textiles designed by a mod Shaker. Through Aug. 8. (Bailey, 511 W. 25th St. 212-989-0156.)

"ZERO ZONE"
The curator David Hunt borrowed his epigrammatic title from Robert Smithson, who wrote that time is "a zero-zone, wherein the spaceman meets the brontosaurus in a Jurassic swamp on Mars." Demetrius Oliver's celestial photographs feel appropriate to the tripped-out context, as does Jane Benson's creepy tar-and-ostrich-feathers sculpture. Time is certainly a zero zone for the face that appears in John Espinosa's pneumatic sphere: it's a portrait of the beautiful, anonymous Frenchwoman known as "L'Inconnue de la Seine," who drowned in the eighteen-eighties and whose death mask was reportedly used as a model for C.P.R. training mannequins. With works by Ian Cooper, Rashid Johnson, Rosy Keyser, and Siebren Versteeg. Through Aug. 8. (Williams, 313 W. 4th St. 212-229-2757.)

Alejandro Escovedo plays Central Park SummerStage.

DANIEL HERTZBERG

Short List

ARMLEDER, MOSSET, STEINBACH: Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Aug. 15. **TETSUMI KUDO:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through Aug. 15. **"CELEBRATE SUMMER":** Jenkins Johnson, 521 W. 26th St. 212-629-0707. Through Aug. 30. **"I WON'T GROW UP":** Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Aug. 29. **"IDLE YOUTH":** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Aug. 15. **"WHEN COLOR WAS NEW":** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Sept. 6.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

SCOTT B. DAVIS
Working at night with a homemade large-format view camera—a bigger version of the boxy equipment that pioneering American photographers trundled through Yosemite and the Grand Canyon—Davis records not scenic vistas but the empty lots and anonymous structures that dot the contemporary California landscape. Because his images have an ominous quality, these gas stations, parking lots, and gated stores all feel like potential crime scenes. This is Ed Ruscha territory, but Davis gives it a noir twist and serves it up in rich platinum prints that render even the deadest of dead ends—a broad, sandy highway shoulder crisscrossed with tire tracks—weirdly seductive. Through Sept. 6. (Hous Projects, 31 Howard St. 212-941-5801.)

"PRETTY UGLY"
Sprawling, confusing, grotesque, and impressive, this dual-gallery show was organized by Alison Gingeras. One wall boasts flower paintings by the unlikely triumvirate of Murakami, Warhol, and Marsden Hartley. Jorg Immendorff's green-themed canvas is paired with Edward Middleton Manigault's Cézannesque canvas "Tree Rhythms," from 1918. A salacious John Currin painting hovers above a Haim Steinbach shelf; a Hans Bellmer photograph is forced into conversation with Guy Bourdin's avant-fashion photographs and an early Eva Hesse painting. There are rooms devoted to the themes of "Fluids," "Ladies," "Heads," and "Pink and/or Gold." The whole thing is exhilaratingly heterodox, but it risks becoming an exercise in which curator trumps art. Through Aug. 29. (Brown, 620 Greenwich St. 212-627-5258; Maccarone, 630 Greenwich St. 212-431-4977.)

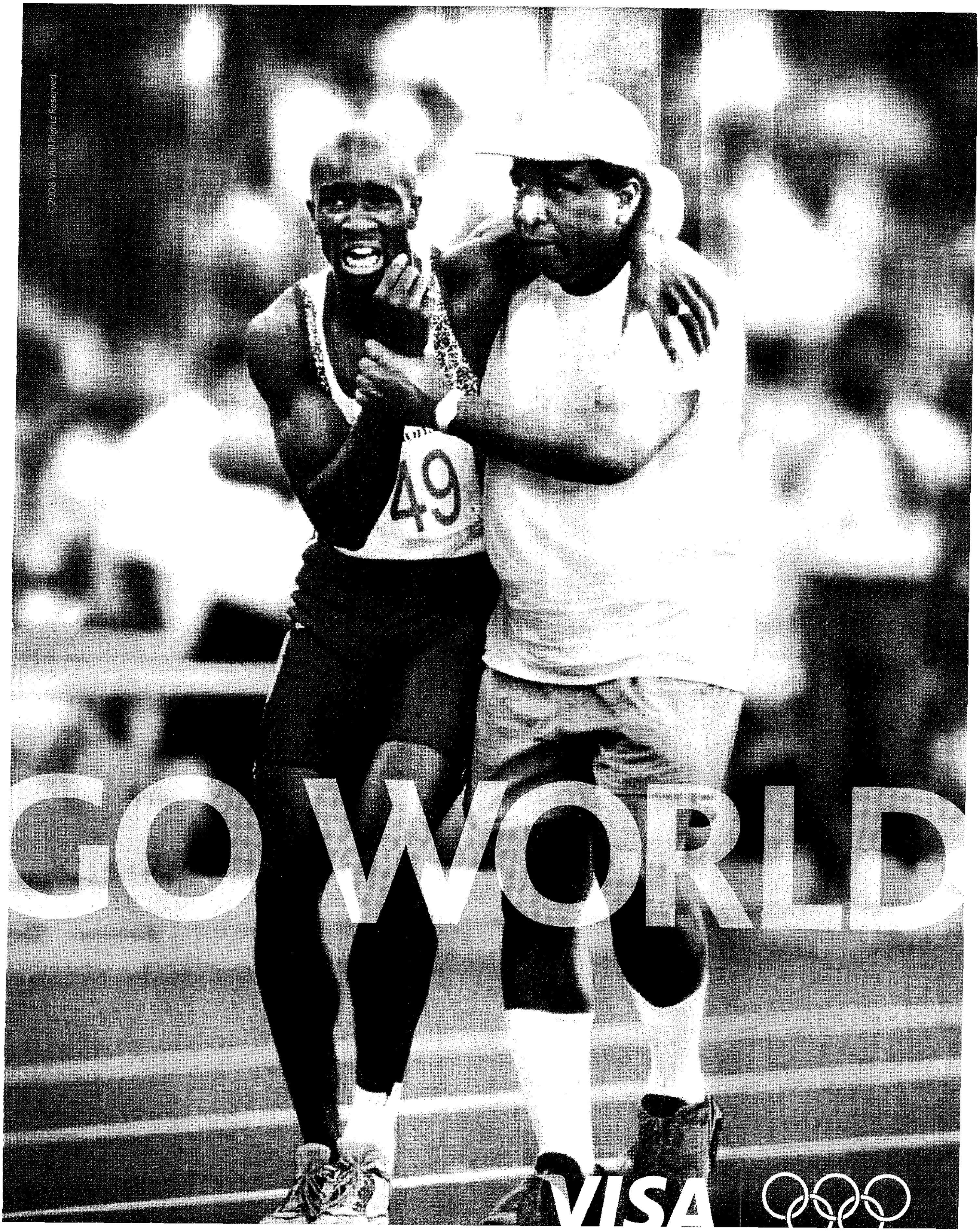
DANCE

MONICA BILL BARNES
In "Game Face," Barnes and seven collaborators take on the business world, in a work commissioned by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's "Sitelines." (Robert Wagner, Jr., Park, just north of Battery Park. 212-219-9401. Aug. 5-7 and Aug. 11-14 at noon and 1.)

HUBBARD STREET DANCE CHICAGO
The Chicago-based contemporary-dance ensemble returns to the Joyce with two programs. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Aug. 5-6 and Aug. 11-13 at 7:30, Aug. 7-8 and Aug. 14-15 at 8, and Aug. 9 and Aug. 16 at 2 and 8.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
The beloved company celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with free performances in a mini tour of the boroughs, and a party at City Center, with three shows and an all-day street fair (Aug. 9 at 11 A.M., 2, and 4:30). Meanwhile, the junior-varsity team, Ailey II, sets out for Staten Island's St. George Theatre (Aug. 5 at 8), the Bronx's Hostos Center (Aug. 6 at 7:30), Brooklyn's Prospect Park (Aug. 7 at 8), and Queens Theatre in the Park (Aug. 12 at 8). The programs concentrate on classic Ailey, with some additions by Robert Battle, Troy Powell, and Jessica Lang. (For more information, visit www.alvinailey.org/free.)

LINCOLN CENTER OUT OF DOORS
Under the new directorship of Bill Bragin, lately of Joe's Pub, the free concert series opens on Aug. 7, as Noche Flamenca and its white-hot star, Soledad Barrio, travel from their East Village encampment to the band shell at Damrosch Park. ♦ Aug. 8: Karole Armitage presents a preview of "Summer of Love," which applies her compound of skewed ballet and club styles to the Afro-pop-meets-electronica sound of Burkina Electric. ♦ That same evening, Ronald K. Brown offers his own mix, proven and uplifting, of West African sophistication and modern dance,


GO WORLD
VISA

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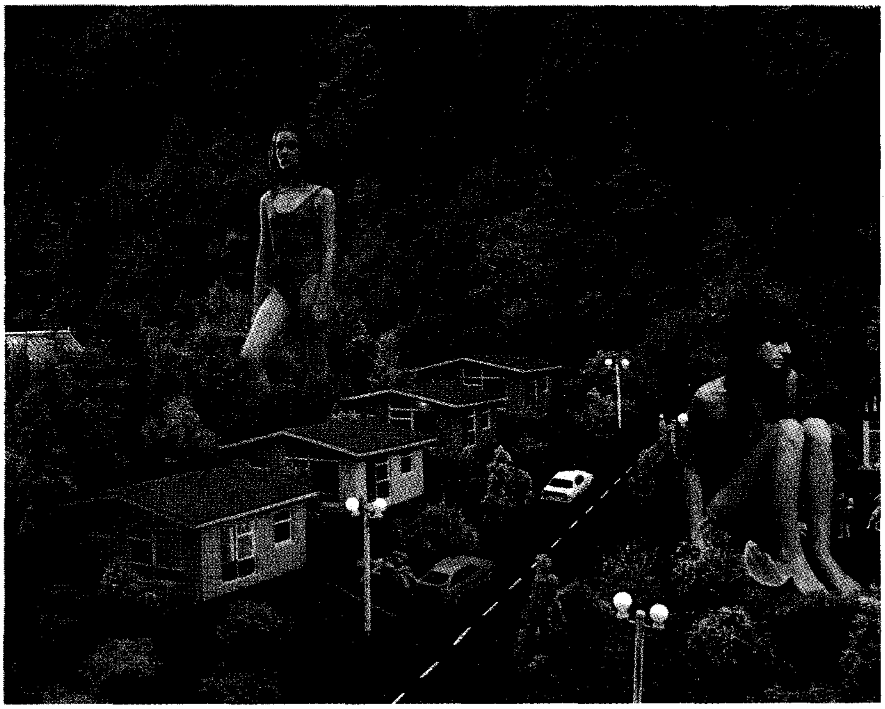
with the repertory pieces “High Life” and “Upside Down.” ♦ Aug. 9: Cyro Baptista & Beat the Donkey, a zany, percussion-mad band known to break into capoeira, sword dancing, and tap, descend from some Brazilian colony in outer space founded by Frank Zappa. ♦ On Aug. 16, Doug Elkins brings back “Fräulein Maria,” his infectiously extroverted dance take on “The Sound of Music,” for two performances. ♦ The same day, the Washington-based ensemble Step Afrika! offers a rousing demonstration of the percussive African-American dance form known as stepping, in two performances. ♦ Aug. 17 is devoted to reinterpretations of African dance tradition: Ologundê brings capoeira and candomblé, from Salvador, Bahia; Haitian drumming is performed by Bonga & the Vodou Drums of Haiti; and the Kotchegna Dance Company offers Ivorian stilt dancers. (Lincoln Center. 212-875-5766. For a complete schedule, visit www.lincolncenter.org.)

HĀLAU I KA WĒKIU

This traditional hula troupe, based in Oahu, comes to Symphony Space, where its stately dancers will illustrate the ancient and beguiling art form, with lilting upper-body movements, percussive footwork, and stylized interpretive gestures. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Aug. 8 at 7.)



“Beach Houses,” by Julia Fullerton-Batten, in “Celebrate Summer,” at Jenkins Johnson.

MAU

The Mostly Mozart Festival offers Lemi Ponifasio’s troupe from New Zealand, twenty-four strong, and his Samoan take on Mozart’s “Requiem.” There’s no Mozart in it, but rather a soundscape of community songs, dripping water, and chirping crickets. It’s a spare, shadowy, and extremely slow-moving ritual given a contemporary gleam, a procession of strange images—bodies that smoke or ooze red liquid—that’s sure to strike some as mysterious and subtle and others as soporific. (Rose Theatre, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. Aug. 8-9 at 7:30.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA

The traditional flamenco company and its extraordinary star, Soledad Barrio, conclude their run at Theatre 80. (80 St. Marks Pl. 212-352-3101. Aug. 8 and Aug. 12-14 at 8, Aug. 9 at 2 and 8, and Aug. 10 at 2 and 5.)

NEW YORK INTERNATIONAL FRINGE FESTIVAL

The sprawling downtown multi-arts festival has a sizable dance component, including “O! Balletto,” a contemporary take on Baroque dance by Lane Gifford; “The Third from the Left,” a play about putting together a revival of Martha Graham’s classic “Primitive Mysteries,” by the former Graham dancer Jean Colonomos; and “Uneka Arnasa,” by Gaitzerdi Teatro, an ensemble based in Bilbao. (Various venues. 212-279-4488. For a full schedule, visit www.fringenyc.org. Aug. 8-24.)

HEADLONG DANCE THEATRE

“Sitelines” brings this smart, often funny experimental group from Philadelphia, performing “Hotel Pool,” set in the indoor pool of a luxury residential building in Battery Park City. Expect lots of splashing, the suspension of gravity, and the evocation of a dreamlike state. (225 Rector Pl. For reservations, which are required, call 212-219-9401. Aug. 12-16 at 8.)

OUT OF TOWN

JACOB’S PILLOW

Aug. 6-10: At the Ted Shawn, Stockholm 59° North, a troupe culled from the Royal Swedish Ballet, presents contemporary works from Sweden and Spain: two compositions by the legendary Mats Ek (“Appartement” and “Pas de Danse”), a new work by Cristina Caprioli, and, for a touch of panache, Nacho Duato’s hyperdramatic “Castrati,” set to Vivaldi. ♦ Aug. 7-10: Light as a feather, with quicksilver arms and fingers that can tell a story by themselves, Shantala Shivalingappa is one of the most thrilling dancers around, a fact that has not been lost on the likes of Peter Brook and Pina Bausch. At the Doris Duke, Shivalingappa performs her specialty, the refined and intricate *kuchipudi*, a dramatic South Indian dance form full of ecstatic jumps, turns, and lunges, all in the service of illustrating Hindu mythology. ♦ Aug. 13-17: At the Ted Shawn, the fine contemporary-ballet company Aspen Santa Fe Ballet performs a mixed bill that includes “1st Flash,” by the ubiquitous Finnish choreographer Jorma Elo, and William Forsythe’s angular, post-structural “Slingerland” pas de deux. ♦ Aug. 14-17: At the Doris Duke, a double bill of choreographers interested in the reshaping power of erotic forces. In “Bridge of Sighs,” by the budding talent Kate Weare, a good-looking quartet slap and tussle their way through passion and pain. In the solos of the Butoh-inspired veteran Maureen Fleming, a single body—often nude—goes through metamorphoses: bending into various sphere shapes, melting down a staircase. Like that of Momix and Cirque du Soleil, Fleming’s work skirts the edge between genuinely new beauty and New Age kitsch. (Becket, Mass. 413-243-0745. For a complete schedule, visit www.jacobspillow.org. Through Aug. 24.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
CONCERTS IN TOWN

MOSTLY MOZART FESTIVAL

The next two weeks bring a bounty of musical riches, both foreign and domestic. Here are some highlights: Aug. 6 at 10:30: Jeremy Denk—one of the most versatile and admired pianists in the city—performs Schubert’s Sonata in B-Flat Major, D. 960, in one of the festival’s popular “Little Night Music” concerts, intimate evenings at the Kaplan Penthouse. ♦ Aug. 8-9 at 8: The pianist Benedetto Lupo makes his New York début in a program that enticingly blends music by Mozart (the Piano Concerto No. 18, K. 456, and the “Little G Minor” Symphony) with French music (Ravel’s “Tombeau de Couperin” and Fauré’s “Pelléas et Mélisande”); Louis Langrée conducts the Mostly Mozart Festival Orchestra. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 12-13 at 8: Two dynamic young musicians—the violinist Janine Jansen and the violist Maxim Rysanov—are featured in a program with the festival orchestra that includes Mozart’s Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major along with works by Martinů and Beethoven (the Seventh Symphony); the venerable Czech maestro Jiří Bělohlávek conducts. (Avery Fisher Hall.) ♦ Aug. 13 and Aug. 15 at 7:30: In one of the major events of the festival, the radiant Dawn Upshaw takes the title role in Kaija Saariaho’s **“La Passion de Simone,”** a “musical path in fifteen stations” inspired by the life of the French radical and mystic Simone Weil. The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and London Voices, conducted by the young Finnish phenom Susanna Mälkki, will provide an unusually distinguished accompaniment. (Rose Theatre.) ♦ Aug. 15-16 at 8: Osmo Vänskä, the disciplined director of the Minnesota Orchestra, leads the festival orchestra through its paces in a program featuring Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto (played on the basset clarinet, as the composer wished, by Kari Kriikku), preceded by Sibelius’s “Pelleas and Melisande” Suite and followed by Beethoven’s Symphony No. 2 in D Major. (Avery Fisher Hall.) (212-721-6500. For full schedule, see www.lincolncenter.org.)

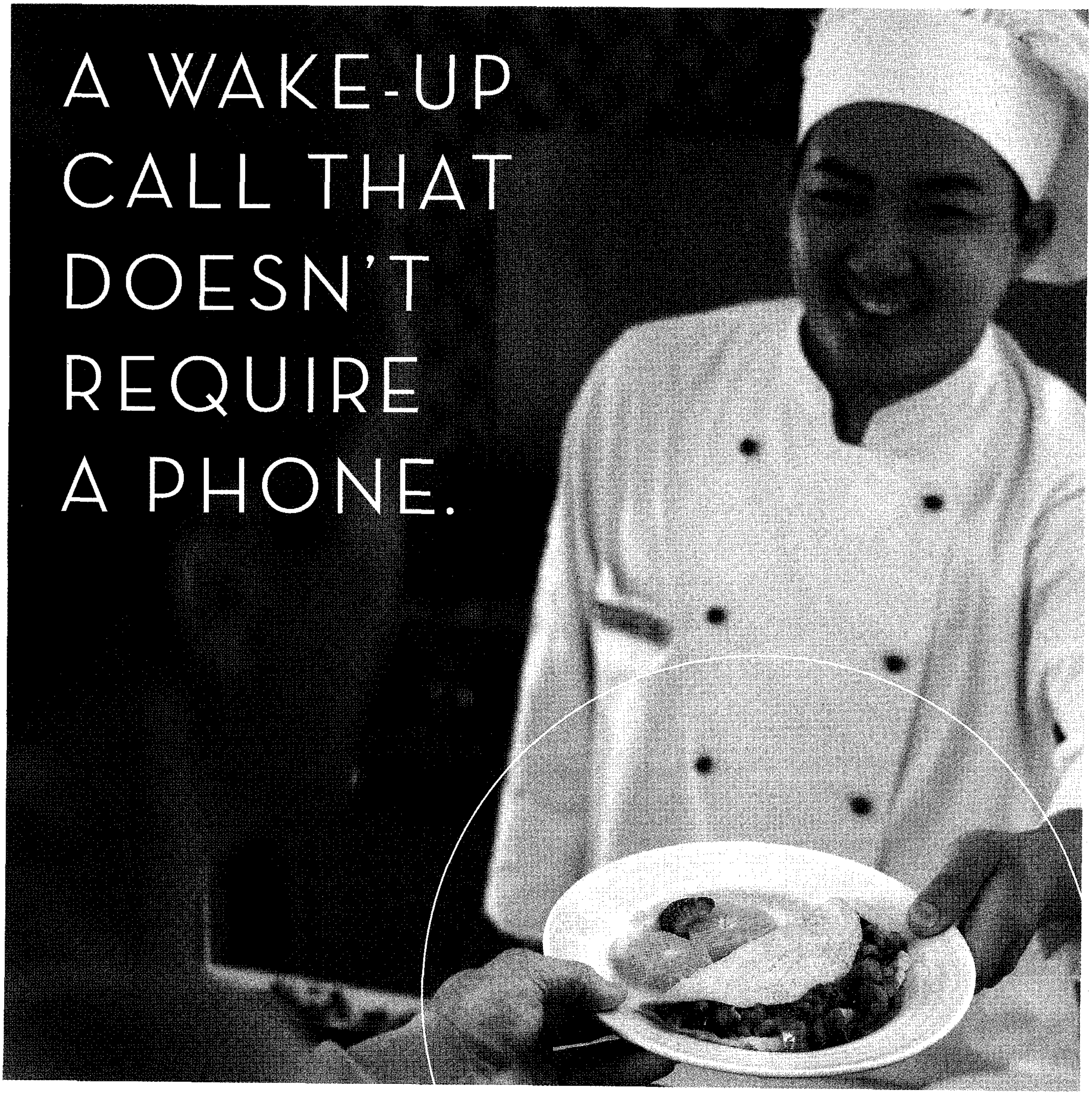
BARGEMUSIC

Aug. 9 at 8 and Aug. 10 at 4: An impressively staffed pickup string quartet (featuring the violinist Mark Peskanov and the cellist Nicholas Canellakis) offers two works by Mozart (including the dulcet Clarinet Quintet, with Alexander Fiterstein) as well as Dick Hyman’s “Dances and Diversions.” ♦ Aug. 15 at 8 and Aug. 17 at 4: The young and adventurous Zukofsky Quartet will be committed advocates for the dauntingly difficult String Quartet No. 5 by Milton Babbitt, a work that will be bookended by music by Bach (“The Art of Fugue,” Nos. 1-4) and Bruckner (the String Quintet, with the violist Thomas Rosenthal). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083. For full schedule, see www.bargemusic.org.)

OUT OF TOWN

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA

Shakespeare is all the rage at Glimmerglass this summer. Aug. 7, Aug. 12, and Aug. 15 at 8; Aug. 9 at 1:30; and Aug. 18 at 2: Anne Bogart’s production of Bellini’s **“I Capuleti e i Montecchi,”** a melodious adaptation of the story that inspired Shakespeare to write “Romeo and Juliet.” Sarah Coburn and Sandra Piques Eddy (*en travesti*) take the leading roles; David Angus conducts. ♦ Aug. 8, Aug. 11, and Aug. 16 at 8 and Aug. 19 at 2: **“Kiss Me, Kate,”** Cole Porter’s Runyonesque treatment of “The Taming of the Shrew.” Lisa Vroman and Brad Little and Courtney Romano and David Larsen are the musical’s two contentious couples; David Charles Abell. ♦ Aug. 9 at 8 and Aug. 17 at 3: Handel’s **“Giulio Cesare,”** with Laura Vlasak Nolen singing the “pants role” of the title and with Lyubov Petrova, another singer from the roster of the Metropolitan Opera, as Cleo-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patra; David Stern. ♦ Aug. 10 at 2, Aug. 14 at 8, and Aug. 16 at 1:30: Richard Wagner's **"Das Liebesverbot"** ("The Ban on Love"), an early, bel-canto-style comic work inspired by "Measure for Measure." Corrado Rovaris conducts a cast that features Mark Schnaible, Claudia Waite, Richard Cox, and Holli Harrison. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

BARD MUSIC FESTIVAL: "PROKOFIEV AND HIS WORLD"

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Prokofiev, once ranked equally with Shostakovich, has fallen behind his junior colleague in both popular and critical acclaim. Leon Botstein's two-weekend festival (with a third in October) aims to redress the balance with a schedule of eleven concerts. Aug. 8 at 8: The festival begins with a concert combining the skills of Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra, the pianist Jeremy Denk, and the Chiara String Quartet, among others, featuring such works as the Symphony No. 1 ("Classical"), the String Quartet No. 1 in B Minor, and the mighty Seventh Piano Sonata. ♦ Aug. 17 at 5:30: The summer series concludes with Botstein conducting an A.S.O. program full of rarities, including Prokofiev's "Egyptian Nights" and "Cantata for the Twentieth Anniversary of the October Revolution," as well as Rachmaninoff's "Three Russian Songs," Op. 41. (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. For full schedule of concerts, panels, and preconcert talks, see www.fishercenter.bard.edu.)

"NEW ALBION AT SUMMERSCAPE"

The lulling rhythms and soothing colors of West Coast music will come to the Hudson Valley when a mini-festival devoted to the composers and artists of California's beloved New Albion record label arrives at the Spiegeltent. In the second of five upcoming concerts, Ingram Marshall's "Fog Tropes" begins a program that also features works by Feldman, Satoh, Dresher, and Adams (the thrilling "Shaker Loops"). (Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y. 845-758-7900. Aug. 8 at 8:30. For full schedule, see www.fishercenter.bard.edu.)

NORFOLK CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

A powerhouse group of Norfolk regulars—including the clarinettist David Shifrin, the bassoonist Frank Morelli, and the pianist André-Michel Schub—offers a concert of masterworks by Poulenc, Beethoven (the "Ghost" Trio), and Dvořák (the grand Serenade for Winds in D Minor). (Norfolk, Conn. 860-542-3000. Aug. 8 at 8. For full schedule, see www.norfolkmusic.org.)

TANGLEWOOD FESTIVAL

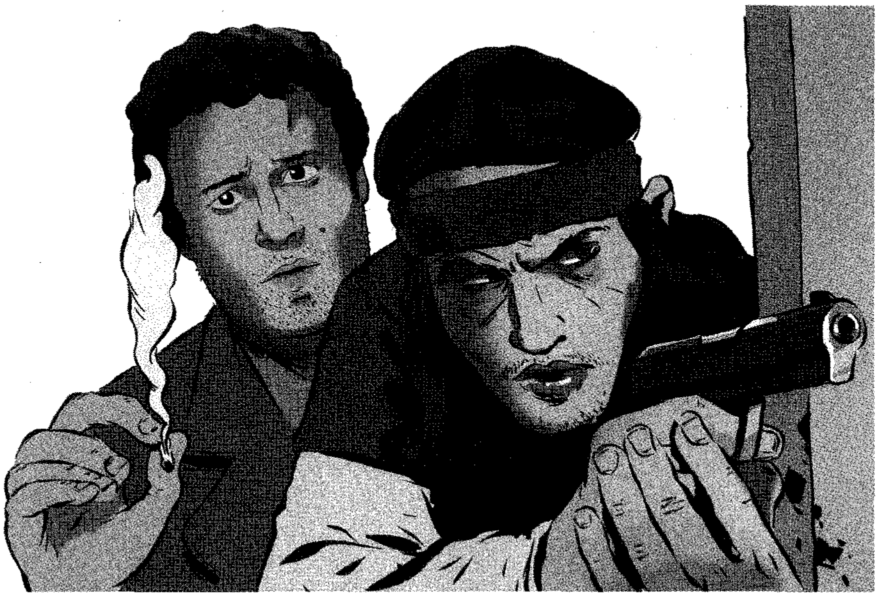
The supreme music festival of the summer reaches its apex in mid-August; some highlights follow. Aug. 8 at 8:30: In the first of three all-Mozart concerts given by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Andrew Davis conducts a program featuring the Horn Concerto No. 3 (with James Sommerville), the Piano Concerto No. 12 in A Major (with a magisterial soloist, Leon Fleisher), and the Symphony No. 39 in E-Flat Major. ♦ Aug. 9 at 2 and Aug. 10-11 at 7:30: Erik Nielsen, a young conductor at the Tanglewood Music Center, steps into James Levine's shoes to lead three T.M.C. performances of Weill and Brecht's **"Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny"** (in English, fully staged). ♦ Aug. 13 at 8: In "Roses, Flutes, and Paris," the mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade (joined by the flutist Mathieu Dufour and the pianist Peter Grunberg) weaves a garland of elegant songs by Rorem, Fauré, Roussel, Jake Heggie, and Edith Piaf. ♦ Aug. 14 at 8: Webern's Six Bagatelles and Reich's "Triple Quartet" anchor a typically freewheeling program by the Kronos Quartet that includes works by John Zorn, Alexandra Vrebalov, and Sigur Rós (arranged by Stephen Prutsman). ♦ Aug. 16 at 8:30: Jean-Yves Thibaudet will bring his fleet and luminous sound to Khachaturian's clangorous Piano Concerto, the centerpiece of a B.S.O. program conducted by André Previn that also features works by Glinka and Prokofiev (the Symphony No. 5). (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200. For full schedule, see www.bso.org.)

MARLBORO FESTIVAL

The festival-and-school founded by Rudolf Serkin remains a bastion of chamber music at its best, with some of the world's leading musicians and their remarkably talented protégés. Concert programs are listed a week in advance on the festival's Web site, www.marlboromusic.org. (Marlboro, Vt. 802-254-2394. Aug. 8-9 at 8:30 and Aug. 10 at 2:30. These are the final performances.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS

Aug. 9 at 6: The St. Lawrence String Quartet balances passion and precision on a razor's edge. Its concert offers works by Haydn, Berg (the expressive "Lyric Suite"), and Schubert (the String Quintet, with the cellist David Ying). ♦ Aug. 10 at 4: A program performed by the elegant, Boston-based Borromeo Quartet is a snapshot of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in its splendid final days—Wolf's "Italian Serenade," Bartók's Quartet No. 1, and Bruckner's rich-textured String Quintet (with the violist Michael Klotz). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4: Klotz returns with his partners in the Amernet String Quartet to play music by Schubert (the Quartet in E-Flat Major, Op. 125, No. 1), Dvořák, and the American neo-Romantic Vittorio Giannini (the Piano Quintet, with James Tocco.) (Woodstock, N.Y. For information about tickets, call 845-679-8217.)



Seth Rogen and James Franco star in David Gordon Green's "Pineapple Express."

ZOHAR LAZAR

TANNERY POND CONCERTS

The pianist and photographer Christian Steiner's series, held in an old Shaker tannery, has an almost private ambience. He next hosts an utterly charming pair of performers—the soprano Amy Burton and her husband, the pianist John Musto—who will offer a bouquet of songs by the likes of Piaf, Cole Porter, Poulenc, Gershwin, and Oscar Straus. (Darrow School, New Lebanon, N.Y. 888-820-9441. Aug. 9 at 8.)

BRIDGEHAMPTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL

An appealingly broad range of works fill the programs of this East End festival, now in its final weeks. Aug. 10 at 6:30: Arvo Pärt's "Summa," Mendelssohn's Sextet for Piano and Strings, and Stravinsky's "Soldier's Tale," featuring not only such musicians as the violinist Colin Jacobsen and the cellist Edward Arron but also the former Pink Floyd bassist Roger Waters, as narrator. ♦ Aug. 14 at 6:30: A little walk on the wild side with the avant-garde trio Real Quiet (featuring the percussionist David Cossin) that includes works by Kaija Saariaho, Lou Harrison, and Huang Ruo ("Real Loud"). (Bridgehampton Presbyterian Church. 631-537-6368. For full schedule, see www.bcmf.org.)

MOVIES OPENING

ANITA O'DAY: THE LIFE OF A JAZZ SINGER

A documentary about the singer, directed by Robbie Cavolina and Ian McCrudden. Opening Aug. 15. (Cinema Village.)

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

Aaron Rose and Joshua Leonard directed this documentary, about the intersection of such nineteen-nineties subcultures as skateboarding, punk, hip-hop, and graffiti. Opening Aug. 9. (IFC Center.)

BOTTLE SHOCK

A comic drama, directed by Randall Miller, about the 1976 competition in which a California winemaker defeated famous French vintners. Starring Alan Rickman, Chris Pine, and Bill Pullman. Opening Aug. 6. (In limited release.)

ELEGY

Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 8. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

FIRE UNDER THE SNOW

Makoto Sasa directed this documentary about Palden Gyatso, a Tibetan monk who was tortured in Chinese prisons, where he was held for thirty-three years, and who, after his release, participated in a hunger strike to protest the Beijing Olympics. Opening Aug. 8. (Village East Cinemas.)

A GIRL CUT IN TWO

Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 15. (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HELL RIDE

Larry Bishop wrote, directed, and stars in this neo-grindhouse thriller about biker gangs. Co-starring Michael Madsen, Dennis Hopper, and David Carradine. Opening Aug. 8. (In wide release.)

HENRY POOLE IS HERE

Luke Wilson stars in this comedy as a suburban hermit whose neighbors find a supposedly holy apparition on his wall. Directed by Mark Pellington; co-starring Adriana Barraza and Radha Mitchell. Opening Aug. 15. (In wide release.)

MIRRORS

A horror film, directed by Alexandre Aja, about a family being targeted by evil forces that enter their home through mirrors. Starring Kiefer Sutherland. Opening Aug. 15. (In wide release.)

ONE BAD CAT

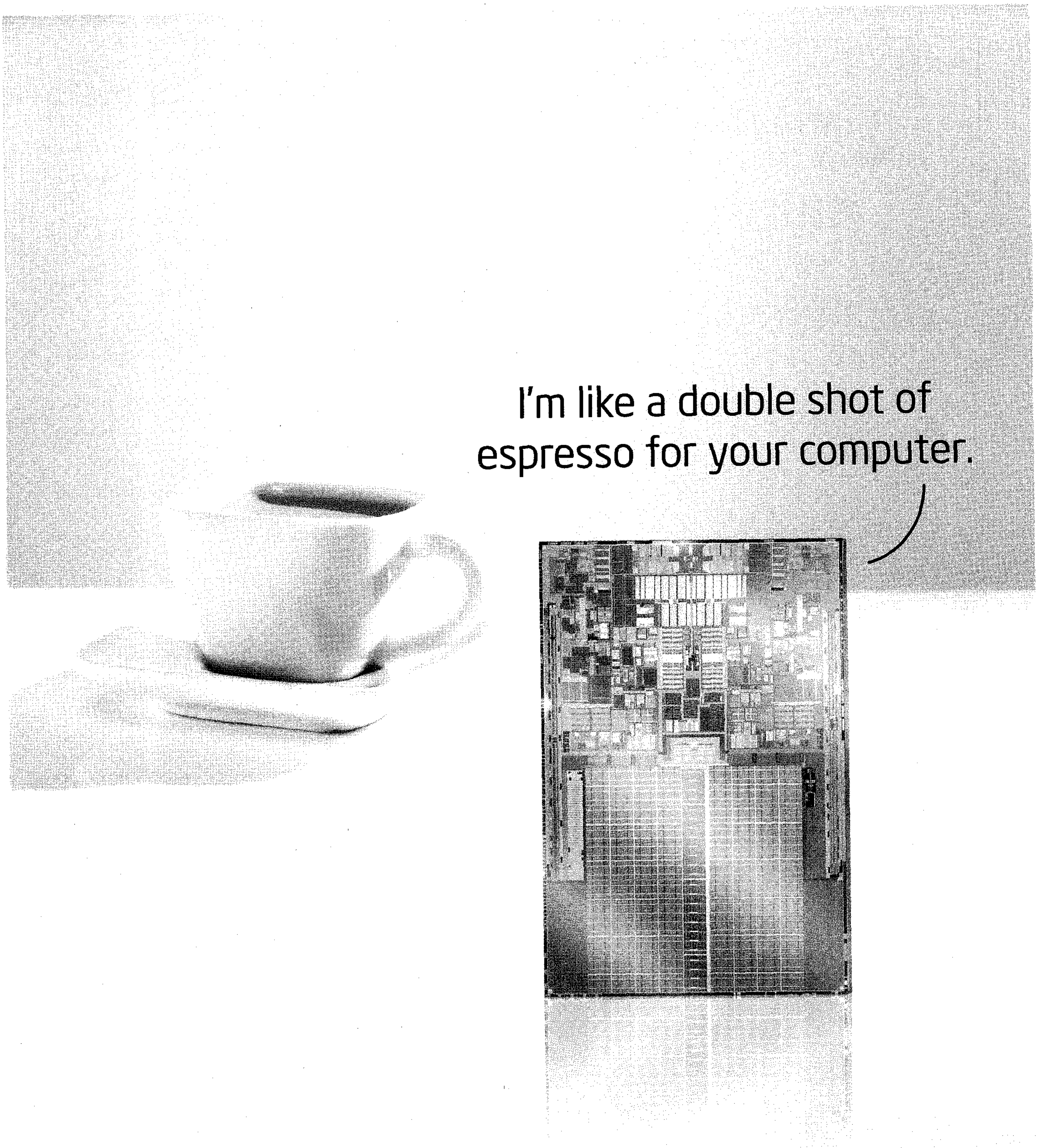
Thomas G. Miller directed this documentary, about the Reverend Albert Wagner, an African-American outsider artist. Opening Aug. 15. (IFC Center.)

PATTI SMITH: DREAM OF LIFE

A documentary about the musician, directed by Steven Sebring. Opening Aug. 6. (Film Forum.)

THE PERFECT GAME

A family sports drama, directed by William Dear, about the first non-U.S. team to win the Little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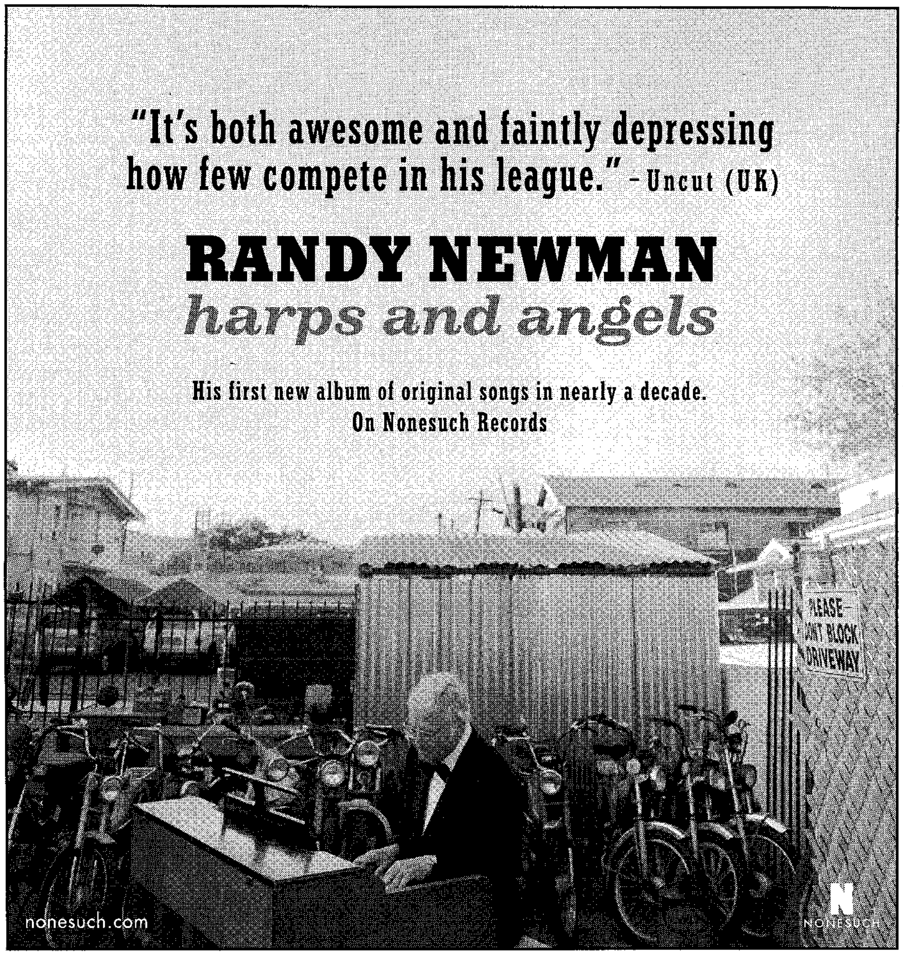
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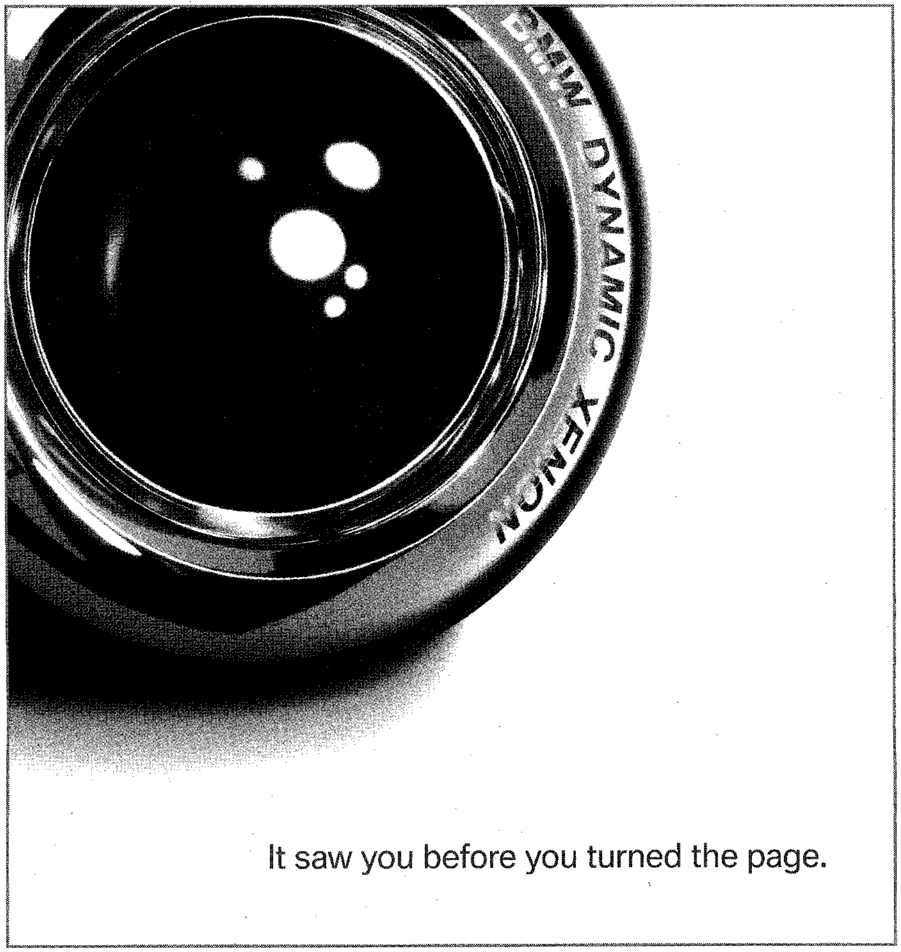


It saw you before you turned the page.

League World Series, in 1957. Starring Ryan Ochoa and Cheech Marin. Opening Aug. 8. (In wide release.)

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 8. (In wide release.)

THE ROMANCE OF ASTREA AND CELADON
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening Aug. 14. (Anthology Film Archives.)

THE SISTERHOOD OF THE TRAVELING PANTS 2
Sanaa Hamri directed this sequel based on the young-adult novel by Ann Brashares, starring Alexis Bledel, America Ferrera, Blake Lively, and Amber Tamblyn as four friends who reunite after leaving home for college. Opening Aug. 6. (In wide release.)

STAR WARS: THE CLONE WARS
Dave Filoni directed this animated installment, which will be continued on television. Opening Aug. 15. (In wide release.)

TROPIC THUNDER
Ben Stiller directed and stars in this comedy, as a movie actor on location in Southeast Asia who is thrown into a real-life survival adventure. Co-starring Robert Downey, Jr., and Jack Black. Opening Aug. 13. (In wide release.)

VICKY CRISTINA BARCELONA
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Aug. 15. (In wide release.)

WHAT WE DO IS SECRET
A bio-pic about the L.A. punk band the Germs, directed by Rodger Grossman and starring Shane West, Bijou Phillips, Rick Gonzalez, and Noah Segan. Opening Aug. 8. (Sunshine Cinema.)

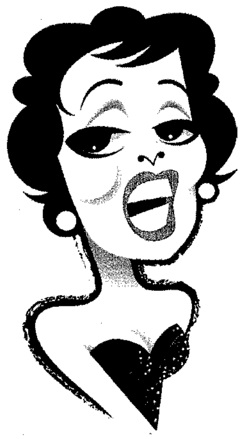
WILD CHILD
Emma Roberts stars in this romantic comedy, as a spoiled L.A. girl who is sent off to an English boarding school. Co-starring Natasha Richardson, Shirley Henderson, and Aidan Quinn and directed by Nick Moore. Opening Aug. 15. (In wide release.)

NOW PLAYING

THE DARK KNIGHT
The last Batman movie was grim and methodical; this one, also directed by Christopher Nolan, is grim and incoherent, with a thudding soundtrack, fights shot from too close a distance to see anything, multiple events clanging together like discordant bells, and freaky sadism and menace. Christian Bale is the placid Bruce Wayne, a swank gent in Armani suits. As Batman, he has greater urgency, but he delivers his lines in a hoarse voice with an unvarying inflection. He's no match for the great Heath Ledger as his nemesis, the Joker. Ledger, in a fright wig and gobs of white makeup, shambles and slides into a room, bending his knees and twisting his neck and suddenly surging right into someone's face like a deep-sea creature coming up for air. He's thoroughly terrifying (do not, despite the PG-13 rating, bring little children), and, as you're watching him, you can't help wondering how badly he messed himself up in order to play the role this way. "The Dark Knight" has been made in a time of terror, but it's not fighting terror; it's embracing and unleashing it—while making sure, with proper calculation, to set up the next installment of the corporate franchise. With Gary Oldman, Aaron Eckhart, and Maggie Gyllenhaal.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 7/21/08.) (In wide release.)

FROZEN RIVER
The chill air of December in northern New York State, at the Canadian border, blows through the hardscrabble lives on view in Courtney Hunt's first feature film, a prize-winner at the Sundance festival. Ray Eddy (Melissa Leo), a mother of two boys, has just been abandoned by her husband, a recovering drug addict and a compulsive gambler, who's run off with the bankroll that was earmarked for a new, warm double-wide trailer. Searching for him at the nearby Mohawk reservation, she meets Lila Littlewolf (Misty Upham), who lures her into smuggling a pair of Chinese immigrants into the United States. The cash that goes with it suggests to Ray a way out of her plight. Hunt's film, made quickly and on a low budget, is full of traditional virtues—sympathetic and complex characters, plausible situations, evocative locations, committed

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
VOICE OF CHOICE


KIRSTEN ULVE

If Anita O'Day didn't invent the role of the hip white chick, she certainly held the patent on it. All you have to do is watch Bert Stern's strange, almost hallucinatory 1958 documentary, "Jazz on a Summer's Day," to get a fairly good idea of O'Day's particular talents. In the film, the Chicago-born singer—who died in 2006, at age eighty-seven—is dressed in a black hat and a tight-fitting cocktail dress, the epitome of cool. O'Day admitted to having been high on heroin during the concert, and she was unaware of being filmed. But her rendition of "Sweet Georgia Brown" is the hit of the movie, revealing her need to communicate how joyful, tough, smart, and shy she was, all at once. Those qualities are on display in Robbie Cavolina and Ian McCrudden's moving, heartfelt documentary, "Anita O'Day: The Life of a Jazz Singer," which opens on Aug. 15. In it, we see O'Day dismiss a journalist's questions about her personal life with the skill she evinced as a singer: with utter clarity of intention and absolutely no room for bullshit.

—*Hilton Als*

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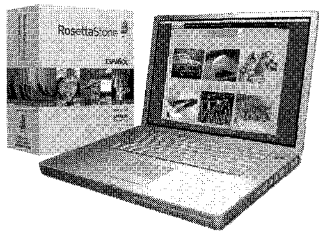

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acting, painful moral dilemmas—everything but a touch of mad beauty and a raison d'être. Hunt, who also wrote the script, directs a story of misery and transcendence with the kind of diligent efficiency you'd expect from an experienced studio toiler. What hath Sundance wrought?—*Richard Brody* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

A GIRL CUT IN TWO

Pushing eighty, having made more than fifty features, Claude Chabrol has found his new theme: randy old goats. This suavely romantic bourgeois thriller, like last year's "Comedy of Power," stars the paunchy, sad-eyed François Berléand as a philandering bon vivant in trouble. Here he plays Charles Saint-Denis, a successful and respected novelist who lives elegantly in Lyons with his charming and devoted wife (Valeria Cavalli). At a cocktail party, the writer falls hard for a chirpy yet strong-willed and ambitious local weather forecaster (Ludivine Sagnier), who is also the romantic obsession of Paul Gaudens (Benoît Magimel), a fabulously wealthy, dissolute, and unhappy young idler with a flamboyant coiffure, a splashy wardrobe, zero charm, and a bottomless hatred for the local literary celebrity. Chabrol has a keen eye and ear for the artistic beau monde, his own milieu, and depicts its foibles with a self-satisfied, cynical blend of ribald satire and sympathetic tenderness (though he has no use for the haute bourgeoisie of grand inherited wealth and reduces the whole Gaudens family to dull, puppet-like villains). Nonetheless, the sleek direction, impeccable nuances of manner, and cleverly constructed script (which Chabrol co-wrote with Cécile Maistre) raise the melodramatic triangle to a darkly intelligent romp—and the ending, the former critic's sharp cinephilic nod to Max Ophüls's "Lola Montès," packs a sly and potent symbolic punch.—*R.B.* (IFC Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HELLBOY II: THE GOLDEN ARMY

The fabulist director Guillermo del Toro gets a hefty budget to continue his comic-book franchise with this action-packed fantasy about a heroic demon (Ron Perlman) and his fellow-beasties (Selma Blair and Doug Jones). This time, his team is joined by an ectoplasmic force (voiced by Seth MacFarlane, with a Colonel Klink-like accent) that can animate inanimate objects. It's that kind of movie. The plot is thin, involving some hooey about the denizens of a hidden underground world who are out to destroy humanity. And, while Hellboy and his friends set out to save the day, intriguing story lines are brought up and then dropped. (In all likelihood they will be picked up in a third installment.) This film is happy to coast on its good humor and brilliant action pieces. Fair enough, since del Toro has taken the poetry of some of his best work and butched it up, creating some of the most amazing-looking creatures and battles of his career. It's eye candy for the "Creature Features" set.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

IN SEARCH OF A MIDNIGHT KISS

A romantic comedy, of sorts, although most of the comedy winds up eating away at the romance. Written and directed by Alex Holdridge, it introduces us to a bored and bloodless slacker named Wilson (Scoot McNairy), who is adrift in Los Angeles. Most of the story takes place on New Year's Eve, which he spends first in the company of his housemates (Brian McGuire and Katie Luong) and then, more haltingly, with Vivian (Sara Simmonds), who lies somewhere between a blind date and a booby trap. The two of them traipse around the city, which is rendered in lustrous monochrome; its beauty, however, seems to pass them by, just as anything more than a hint of emotional connection tends to unnerve them. You wonder why either of them would want to spend time (especially a festive occasion) with the other, and much of their fierce dismay at the world comes across as whining, backed by a plaintive soundtrack; yet there is something oddly touching, in the end, about these lost kids who play at grownup life. Great work by the director of photography, Robert Murphy.—*Anthony Lane* (8/4/08) (IFC Center.)

JOURNEY TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

The work of Jules Verne continues to offer fertile ground for filmmakers. This latest adaptation of the 1864 novel is less fruitful than the 1959 animate, in which the softly decisive voice of James Mason acted as a special effect in itself. Still, the new film, directed by Eric Brevig, at least has the courage of its own silliness; dispensing almost instantly with logic, it plunges its professor hero (Brendan Fraser) and his reluctant nephew (Josh Hutcherson) with Vernian briskness into their subterranean exploits, during which they encounter a lonely Icelandic maiden, a thundering dinosaur, and other fantastical creatures. Some theatres will be screening the movie in 3-D: worth catching, if you want the full headlong nonsense to loom out and smack you in the face.—*A.L.* (7/28/08) (In wide release.)

MAMMA MIA!

If viewed on a Saturday night with seven or eight friends, all drunk, this might seem a compelling dose of musical entertainment. Under any other conditions, it barely approaches the tolerable. Meryl Streep, having clearly given much thought to the art of letting one's hair down, plays Donna, who runs a hotel on a Greek island and pretends to forget her heady, promiscuous past; needless to say, it surfaces again when her daughter, Sophie (Amanda Seyfried), a bride-to-be, invites the three men who could conceivably be her father (Pierce Brosnan, Colin Firth, and Stellan Skarsgård) to attend the festivities. All of this is an excuse for the stars to perform, with varying degrees of skill, the greatest hits of Abba, some of which, regrettably, do not survive the disfigurement. Brosnan appears to be laboring under particular distress, and his expression, as he listens to Streep chanting her woes, is indistinguishable from that of James Bond being ranted at by a deluded villain. The script is by Catherine Johnson, who wrote the original stage play; the play's director, Phyllida Lloyd, is also along for the ride, and she seems so thrilled to have a camera at her command that she forces many of her actors to yelp and croon in closeup—never a good idea. The lighting would disgrace the interior of a bathroom. With Christine Baranski, who really can sing and dance, and Julie Walters, who can't.—*A.L.* (7/28/08) (In wide release.)

PINEAPPLE EXPRESS

It's a two-guys-on-the-run action comedy, based on an old idea by Judd Apatow, who also co-produced. Seth Rogen, a process server in a suit, witnesses a drug rubout; James Franco, Seth's pot dealer, knows the murderer, who goes in pursuit of the two of them with his pals. Both men are stoned all the time, and have to keep reminding themselves, in long, muzzy conversations that are an important part of the picture, that they are actually in serious trouble. The movie, directed by David Gordon Green, has an odd, interesting stop-and-go rhythm. The violence is perpetrated with the means at hand—bongs, lamps, coffeepots—and people often apologize for the damage they are doing. The big shoot-out and explosion at the end, however, are depressingly conventional. With Danny R. McBride as an exceptionally slippery drug distributor who takes a lot of punishment. Written by Rogen and Evan Goldberg.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

THE ROMANCE OF ASTREA AND CELADON

If, as the eighty-seven-year-old Eric Rohmer has suggested, this is his last film, he's leaving the stage with an audacious flourish, infusing a fifth-century pastoral fantasy (via a seventeenth-century novel) with a lifetime of themes, passions, and big ideas. The young shepherd and shepherdess of the title are driven apart through a misunderstanding. Celadon becomes jealous, Astrea breaks up with him, and Celadon tries to drown himself—only to be rescued by three noble nymphs from a nearby castle, one of whom, the mistress of the manor, falls for him. As usual, Rohmer shows the way to true love through the rejection of a false one; making his eighteenth-century moralist's view explicit, he sets the misadventures in images redolent of Watteau and Fragonard. The crucial moments are dialectical—a disputation between a faithful lover and a capering libertine, a druid's pagan proof of monotheism and the Trinity. As a result, it takes Rohmer a long time to reunite the original pair, but from love delayed,

TABLES FOR TWO
RHONG-TIAM

THENTIC THAI FOO
RHONG-TIAM

HONORE BROWN

541 LaGuardia Pl. (212-477-0600)—It's easy to walk straight past this unassuming Thai eatery, which is set deep in the heart of the N.Y.U.-occupied Village and shares a commercial strip with a liquor store, a mailing center, and a Citibank. The co-owner, Andy Yang, and his partner's family also own the Malaysian restaurant chain Penang; inside, Rhong-Tiam is almost oppressively generic. Ivy winds around a bannister. The tired-looking upholstery is striped in black-and-white. The tables wobble. The lighting is bright and almost antiseptic.

But then there are the idiosyncrasies: the pink Vespa that takes up most of the entryway (meaning there's little room for waiting diners), the dashing ensemble of fedora and waistcoat worn by the host. In place of Penang's insipid fare, there's an extensive list of Thai dishes, some of which have enough heat to inspire comparisons to the incomparable Sripraphai, in Queens. These are each marked on the menu by a tiny chile pepper, but there really should be gradations. The spice of the pineapple *achat*, a piquant mix of pickled vegetables, tofu, and pineapple, isn't anywhere close to that of the Pork on Fire, a delectable concoction that amply lives up to its name. Sautéed with lemongrass, Kaffir-lime leaves, basil, and bird's-eye chiles, the pork tips are fiery enough to bring tears to your eyes (not least because it's nearly impossible to avoid biting into a crispy chile). Yet the fire isn't without flavor: even as the southern-style chicken, minced and reddened with curry, singes the tongue, hints of ginger and lime are equally discernible. A catfish-and-green-mango salad—served, McDLT-style, with the mango and fried catfish kept separate—is a wonder of zing, crunch, and cool.

There are areas in the menu that are best skipped over, or left to less adventurous dining companions. Drunken Noodle is a well-done classic, but both it and the capably seasoned black-pepper beef felt mandatory rather than inspired. "Thai nachos" turned out to be a heap of greasy shrimp chips the texture of Styrofoam, with a mild dipping sauce of coconut and minced shrimp and chicken. "The most interesting thing about this is the name," one diner recently complained. Dessert, a generally unremarkable course at most Thai restaurants, might easily be overlooked, with its conventional offerings of mango sticky rice and green-tea ice cream. But there is also a wedge of pumpkin, filled with custard and surrounded by a delicately rendered sauce of sweet coconut. It looks almost too lovely to eat, but you'll manage. (Open daily for lunch and dinner. Entrées $8-$15.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

he asserts, nothing less than music, painting, poetry, architecture, and religion are born. In French.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

SWING VOTE

This Capra-esque satire of electoral politics shamelessly milks a host of clichés, from the common man's innate moral compass to the wisdom of children, but it's redeemed by perfect comic pitch, able pacing, and sincere democratic warmth. Much of the credit goes to Kevin Costner for his hearty vigor as Bud Johnson, a ne'er-do-well blowhard living in a trailer in Texico, New Mexico, whose vote—through a series of surprisingly plausible coincidences—turns out to decide the state, which, in turn, will decide the Presidential election. Bud, a poor single father whose sole claim on respectability is his daughter, Molly (the smart, relaxed Madeline Carroll), an ambitious and studious fifth grader, will cast that vote ten days after Election Day. When his identity is divulged, his life becomes a media circus, and, to his surprise and glee, he is assiduously courted by the superficial, slick, yet folksy Republican incumbent (Kelsey Grammer) and the tightly wound, wonky, and somewhat effete Democratic challenger (Dennis Hopper). The tone is apt, akin to that of a tall tale; the theme, dear to John Ford, of eliding fact into legend is given a striking new life; and a single brief scene of despair and degradation is more harrowing than most hard-edged dramas. Yet, though the director, Joshua Michael Stern, who co-wrote the script with Jason Richman, trades on American mythology, he has no aptitude for iconic images.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

TOUCHEZ PAS AU GRISBI

Jacques Becker's 1953 portrait of a stylish middle-aged thief named Max (the incomparable Jean Gabin) set the standard for the French underworld crime capers to follow, yet it retains a mellow kick all its own. Subplots slide away fluidly, like the skin of a cocktail onion; the picture starts after Max has made what he hopes will be his last big score. What's crucial proves to be his friendship with his longtime partner, Riton (René Dary), whose inability to age gracefully or to handle an unsatisfied mistress (the young Jeanne Moreau) puts their giant stash at risk. The movie overflows with comic, melancholy ruminations on mortality and sexual fatigue. When Max invites Riton to a swank secret apartment and lays out their plans along with wine and pâté, the sequence plays like a troubled honeymoon for a platonic male marriage. Yet the movie never falls into macho camp. The action is just as vicious as it has to be, and Becker pulls off one tough-guy surprise after another with masterly soft-shoe storytelling. Best of all, Gabin's performance is more than a star turn. He reveals how hard it is for a gangster to keep up a "class act." The co-stars include Lino Ventura in his film début as Max's nemesis; Jean Weiner's music does for the harmonica what the score for "The Third Man" did for the zither. In French.—*Michael Sragow* (Film Forum; Aug. 17-18.)

TRANSSIBERIAN

Filmed in sickly greens and browns against a snowy white backdrop, this thriller starts promisingly, building up a good head of steam. The story concerns an American couple (Woody Harrelson and Emily Mortimer) who, while travelling the Trans-Siberian Express, are targeted by drug runners and an insistent narcotics detective (Ben Kingsley). At first, the script, by Brad Anderson and Will Conroy, tightly weaves characterization with dread in a nuanced, anxiety-producing way. But after a while the director, Anderson, dispenses with all the finesse and turns the film into a blur of double crosses, perpetually slamming train-car doors, and scene-chewing by Kingsley. The movie vanishes.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

WALL-E

It has the waggish adorableness and the tripping-and-falling roughhouse of other animated films, but it's also a work of tragic nostalgia. In the first half, WALL-E, a robotic trash collector and compactor, continues to go about his duties after the human presence has been blown away from Earth by billowing waves of noxious dust. He trolls among the detritus of the vanished culture, fetishizing such junk items as plastic forks, hubcaps, and a tape of the lumbering musical "Hello, Dolly!," which provides him with models of human connection and such oddities as singing and dancing. A robot named EVE—she looks like a hovering white plastic egg designed by Steve Jobs's gang in Cupertino—lands on Earth; he woos her, and then accompanies her to a space station called the Axiom, where, it turns out, the remaining humans have been living for seven hundred years in a totalitarian pleasure garden run by a giant big-box-store company. "WALL-E" blends two kinds of science fiction—the postapocalyptic disaster movie and the dystopian fantasy derived from Aldous Huxley's "Brave New World," in which people are controlled not by coercion but by pleasure. It's also a satire on the engulfing tendencies of consumer capitalism. From the Pixar division of Disney. Directed by Andrew Stanton.—*D.D.* (7/21/08) (In wide release.)

THE X-FILES: I WANT TO BELIEVE

The great denial-fest that is the essence of the relationship between Mulder (David Duchovny) and Scully (Gillian Anderson) continues in the director Chris Carter's second follow-up to his brilliant television series. And while Duchovny and Anderson do stellar work revisiting their iconic characters, the screenplay, by Carter and the "X-Files" alumnus Frank Spotnitz, lets them down with a pedestrian, unengaging plot. The former F.B.I. agents are called in to validate the ability of a psychic (a good Billy Connolly) to track down a missing agent, but the hallmarks of the series—paranormal mystery, conspiracy, and paranoia—are missing from this drab procedural. The film's a disappointment; it looks and sounds like "The X-Files," but it's just something from the files.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

AMERICAN TEEN: In limited release. **THE MUMMY: TOMB OF THE DRAGON EMPEROR:** In wide release. **SIXTY SIX:** Village East Cinemas and 64th and 2nd. **STEP BROTHERS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—Special screenings. Aug. 6-7 at 7 and 9: "Profit Motive and the Whispering Wind" (2007, John Gianvito) and "New Left Note" (1968-82, Saul Levine). ♦ Aug. 8 at 7:30: Short films by George and Mike Kuchar. ♦ Aug. 9-10 at 7:30: "Cry Dr. Chicago" (1971, George Manupelli). ♦ The films of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne. All films are in French. Aug. 7 at 7:15, Aug. 9 at 3, and Aug. 10 at 9:15: "La Promesse" (1996). ♦ Aug. 7 at 9:15, Aug. 9 at 5, and Aug. 10 at 7:15: "Rosetta" (1999). ♦ Aug. 8 at 7, Aug. 9 at 9:15, and Aug. 10 at 3: "The Son" (2002). ♦ Aug. 8 at 9:15, Aug. 9 at 7, and Aug. 10 at 5:15: "The Child" (2005). ♦ "Essential Cinema." Aug. 9 at 5:15: "The Queen of Sheba Meets the Atom Man" (1963/1982, Ron Rice). ♦ Aug. 10 at 5: "The Flower Thief" (Rice, 1960) and "Senseless" (Rice, 1962). ♦ Aug. 13 at 7:30: "The Flowers of St. Francis" (1949, Roberto Rossellini; in Italian). ♦ Aug. 17 at 3:30: Short films by Harry Smith. ♦ Aug. 17 at 5:30: "No. 12: Heaven and Earth Magic" (1950-61, Smith). ♦ "Remembering Arthur Lipsett." Aug. 15-16 at 7: A short-film program. ♦ Aug. 16-17 at 9: "N-Zone" (1970) and "Strange Codes" (1972). ♦ Aug. 15 at 9, Aug. 16 at 5, and Aug. 17 at 7: "Remembering Arthur" (2006, Martin Lavut).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—Special screening. Aug. 6 at 7: "Speedy" (1928, Ted Wilde; silent), with original score performed by the Alloy Orchestra. ♦ The films of Elliott Gould. Aug. 5 and Aug. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "M*A*S*H" (1970, Robert Altman). ♦ Aug. 8 at 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "Little Murders" (1971, Alan Arkin). ♦ Aug. 9 at 3:30, 6:30, and 9:30: "The Long Goodbye" (1973, Altman). ♦ Aug. 10 at 3, 6, and 9: "Busting" (1974, Peter Hyams). ♦ Aug. 16 at 3, 6, and 9: "Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice" (1969, Paul Mazursky). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "California Split" (1974, Altman). ♦ Aug. 18 at 6:50 and 9:15: "I Love My Wife" (1970, Mel Stuart). ♦ Aug. 19 at 7 and 9:30: "Getting Straight" (1970, Richard Rush). ♦ The films of Azazel Jacobs. Aug. 11 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The GoodTimesKid" (2005). ♦ Aug. 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "La Vie de Bohème" (1992, Aki Kaurismäki; in French). ♦ July Aug. 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Nobody Needs to Know" (2003, Jacobs). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6 and 9: "Rude Boy" (1980, Jack Hazan and David Mingay). ♦ Aug. 15 at 7: "Momma's Man" (2008, Jacobs).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—"The Human Condition" (1959-61, Masaki Kobayashi; in Japanese), in three parts. Aug. 6 at 2 and 7:30 and Aug. 7 at noon, 4, 8:10: Part Three, "A Soldier's Prayer." ♦ "The French Crime Wave." All films are in French. Aug. 8-10 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10: "Rififi" (1955, Jules Dassin). ♦ Aug. 11 at 1, 5:25, and 9:50: "Série Noire" (1979, Alain Corneau). ♦ Aug. 11 at 3:05 and 7:30: "Police Python 357" (1976, Corneau). ♦ Aug. 12 at 2:10 and 7: "The Thief of Paris" (1967, Louis Malle). ♦ Aug. 12 at 4:30 and 9:20: "Borsalino" (1970, Jacques Deray). ♦ Aug. 13 at 1, 5:25, and 9:50 and Aug. 14 at 1, 5:25, and 9:45: "Purple Noon" (1969, René Clément). ♦ Aug. 13 at 3:10 and 7:45 and Aug. 14 at 3:10: "La Piscine" (1969, Deray). ♦ Aug. 14 at 7:35: "Les Tontons Flingueurs" (1963, Georges Lautner). ♦ Aug. 15-16 at 1, 3:50, 6:40, and 9:30: "Le Cercle Rouge" (1970, Jean-Pierre Melville). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2:55, 6:35, and 10:15 and Aug. 18 at 2:55: "Touchez Pas au Grisbi" (†). ♦ Aug. 17 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20 and Aug. 18 at 1 and 4:40: "Bob le Flambeur" (1955, Melville). ♦ Aug. 18 at 7: "Riptide" (1949, Yves Allégret). ♦ Aug. 18 at 8:45: "We Are All Murderers" (1952, André Cayatte). ♦ Aug. 19 at 1:30, 5:25, and 9:30: "La Cérémonie" (1995, Claude Chabrol). ♦ Aug. 19 at 3:55 and 7:45: "Murderous Maids" (2000, Jean-Pierre Denis).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Aug. 8-9: "Lord Love a Duck" (1966, George Axelrod). ♦ "Waverly Midnights." Aug. 15-16: "Psych-Out" (1968, Richard Rush). ♦ In revival. Aug. 15-17 at 11 A.M.: "The Seventh Seal" (1957, Ingmar Bergman).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving." Aug. 13-15 at 1:30: "Umberto D" (1952, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). ♦ "Jazz Score." Aug. 6 at 6 and Aug. 9 at 2:30: "Tune In Tomorrow . . ." (1990, Jon Amiel) and "Zoo" (1962, Bert Haanstra; in Dutch). ♦ Aug. 7 at 5:45 and Aug. 10 at 5: "Blues for Trumpet and Koto" (1962, Geoffrey Selden); "The Comic," an episode of "Peter Gunn" (1959, Blake Edwards); and "The Naked Truth," an episode of "Staccato" (1959, Joseph Pevney). ♦ Aug. 7 at 8:15 and Aug. 9 at 6: "Passing Through" (1977, Larry Clark) and "Music Art" (1973, Zbigniew Rybczynski). ♦ "Salvador Dalí: Consumer/Consumed." Aug. 11 at 8:30 and Aug. 15 at 6: "A Bill of Divorcement" (1940, John Farrow). ♦ Aug. 13 at 6: "Riders of the Purple Sage" (1925, Lynn Reynolds; silent). ♦ Aug. 13 at 7:30: "The White Sheik" (1952, Fellini; in Italian) and "Life in Transition" (2005, John Dilworth). ♦ Aug. 14 at 6: "Rear Window" (1954, Alfred Hitchcock) and "Stolen Car" (2007, Noam Murro). ♦ Aug. 14 at 8:30: "The Fountain" (2006, Darren Aronofsky) and "Oftalmología por el Profesor I. Barraquer de Barcelona" (1917, Francesc Puigvert; silent). ♦ The films of Joel and Ethan Coen. Aug. 16 at 2: "Barton Fink" (1991). ♦ Aug. 16 at 4:30: "The Hudsucker Proxy" (1994). ♦ Aug. 16 at 7: "Fargo" (1996). ♦ Aug. 17 at 2: "The Big Lebowski" (1998). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4:30: "The Man Who Wasn't There" (2001). ♦ Aug. 17 at 7: "No Country for Old Men" (2007). ♦ "Looking at Music." Aug. 18 at 6: "Variations VII" (1969, John Cage) and "Bandoneon!" (1969, David Tudor). ♦ Aug. 18 at 8: "Wavelength" (1967, Michael Snow) and "Crossroads" (1976, Bruce Conner).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." Aug. 8 at 9:30: "Stranger than Par-

adise" (1984, Jim Jarmusch), introduced by the author and musician Michael Azerrad. ♦ Aug. 15 at 9:30: "Gandahar" (1988, René Laloux), introduced by the animators Bill Plympton and Signe Baumane.

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Japanese Screen Classics: In Honor of Madame Kawakita." All films are in Japanese. Aug. 6 at 5:15: "The Yellow Handkerchief" (1977, Yoji Yamada). ♦ Aug. 7 at 9: "Branded to Kill" (1967, Seijun Suzuki). ♦ Aug. 8 at 4: "Ikiru" (1952, Akira Kurosawa). ♦ Aug. 8 at 6:45: "Tokyo Drifter" (1966, Suzuki). ♦ Aug. 8 at 8:30 and Aug. 10 at 6: "Intentions of Murder" (1964, Shohei Imamura). ♦ Aug. 9 at 12:30: "Boy" (1969, Nagisa Oshima). ♦ Aug. 9 at 2:30: "Into the Picture Scroll: The Tale of Yamanaka Tokiwa" (2004, Sumiko Haneda). ♦ Aug. 9 at 4:30 and Aug. 14 at 3:15: "Zigeunerweisen" (Suzuki, 1980). ♦ Aug. 9 at 7:20 and Aug. 11 at 12:30: "Conflagration" (1958, Kon Ichikawa). ♦ Aug. 10 at 9: "Stray Dog" (1949, Kurosawa). ♦ Aug. 11 at 2:30 and Aug. 13 at 9:15: "Black Rain" (1989, Imamura). ♦ Aug. 11 at 5 and Aug. 12 at 3:30: "Onibaba" (1964, Kaneto Shindo). ♦ Aug. 11 at 7 and Aug. 13 at 3: "The Island" (1960, Shindo). ♦ Aug. 11 at 9 and Aug. 12 at 1: "The Ceremony" (1971, Oshima). ♦ Aug. 13 at 1 and 5: "A Full-Up Train" (1957, Ichikawa). ♦ Aug. 13 at 7 and Aug. 14 at 1: "Where Spring Comes Late" (1970, Yamada). ♦ "Lindsay Anderson: Revolutionary Romantic." Except where noted, all films are directed by Anderson. Aug. 15-19 at 1:30 and 6:15: "Never Apologize: A Personal Visit with Lindsay Anderson" (2007, Mike Kaplan). ♦ Aug. 15 at 3:45 and Aug. 18 at 8:30: "In Celebration" (1975). ♦ Aug. 15 at 9 and Aug. 16 at 4: "If . . ." (1968). ♦ Aug. 16 at 8:40: "O Lucky Man!" (1973). ♦ Aug. 17 at 4: "My Darling Clementine" (1946, John Ford). ♦ Aug. 17 at 8:40 and Aug. 19 at 3:40: "This Sporting Life" (1963). ♦ Aug. 18 at 4: "The Whales of August" (1987). ♦ Aug. 19 at 8:45: "Britannia Hospital" (1982).

READINGS AND TALKS

"BRINGING DOWN THE GREAT FIREWALL OF CHINA"

According to the PEN American Center, more than forty writers and journalists are currently in prison in China. In advance of the summer Olympics in Beijing, the center has arranged for Edward Albee, Russell Banks, Jessica Hagedorn, Francine Prose, and others to read statements from several of these writers. (New School, 66 W. 12th St. No tickets necessary. Aug. 7 at 7.)

SOLAS

Earlier this year, St. Mark's Bookshop started hosting a reading series at this nearby watering hole. On Aug. 7 at 7:30, it presents Hilton Als, a theatre critic for this magazine, who will talk with the playwright Richard Foreman. (232 E. 9th St. No tickets necessary.)

"WORD FOR WORD"

Bryant Park's reading series continues on Aug. 13 at 12:30 with the actor and comedian Tommy Chong, who will be discussing his new book, "Cheech & Chong: The Unauthorized Autobiography." (Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. For more information, call 212-768-4242.)

BOWERY POETRY CLUB

The novelists Charles Bock and Keith Gessen read from their work. (308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. Tickets at the door. Aug. 19 at 6.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

The dance troupe celebrates its fiftieth anniversary with a series of free performances and classes in all five boroughs, including an all-day street party on Aug. 9 outside its home at City Center, on Fifty-fifth Street, in Manhattan. (For more information, visit www.alvinailey.org. Aug. 5-12. See Dance.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Those who are stranded in the city by the high cost of airfare and the low value of the dollar abroad can dream of the glamour of holidays past at Swann's auction of vintage posters (Aug. 6). Sporty Art Deco water-skiers glide by the Casino Municipal at Bandol (on the Côte d'Azur), the pristine *Vieux Monde* beaches of the Black Sea resort of Varna beckon, and tennis players in immaculate whites dally après-match on the tidy grounds of the Majestic Hotel in Chamonix (in a poster by Candido Aragonese de Faria, circa 1910). Food advertisements also abound at the sale, with pride of place given to a monumental print made by the fin-de-siècle innovator Leonetto Cappiello (renowned for his Cinzano and Bitter Campari posters) for the Piedmontese chocolate company Cioccolato Venchi. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)

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Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.

The films of Jerry Schatzberg, at Anthology.

EDEL RODRIGUEZ

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
LATE ROMANTIC

Aug. 29-31

The big-shot summer festivals have run their course by Labor Day. But Woodstock's Maverick Concerts series offers a rich weekend of events that includes a piano recital devoted to music by Schubert and David Del Tredici and a chamber-orchestra concert, led by Alexander Platt, that features transcriptions of works by Mahler (the Fourth Symphony) and Aaron Jay Kernis. (www.maverickconcerts.org.)

THE THEATRE
CLOTHING OPTIONAL

Sept. 5

Richard Griffiths and Daniel Radcliffe reprise their roles in Peter Shaffer's "Equus," which caused a stir in London when the young "Harry Potter" star appeared in the buff. Thea Sharrock directs at the Broadhurst. (212-239-6200.)

MOVIES
WHAT'S THE STORY?

Sept. 5-11

Jerry Schatzberg, who started as a fashion photographer and whose directing career flourished in the nineteen-seventies, hasn't done much lately, but Anthology Film Archives presents a half-dozen of his intense, stylish features, from "Puzzle of a Downfall Child," featuring Faye Dunaway, through "Street Smart," starring Christopher Reeve and Morgan Freeman. The director will be present on opening night. (212-505-5181.)

ART
PRACTICAL MAGIC

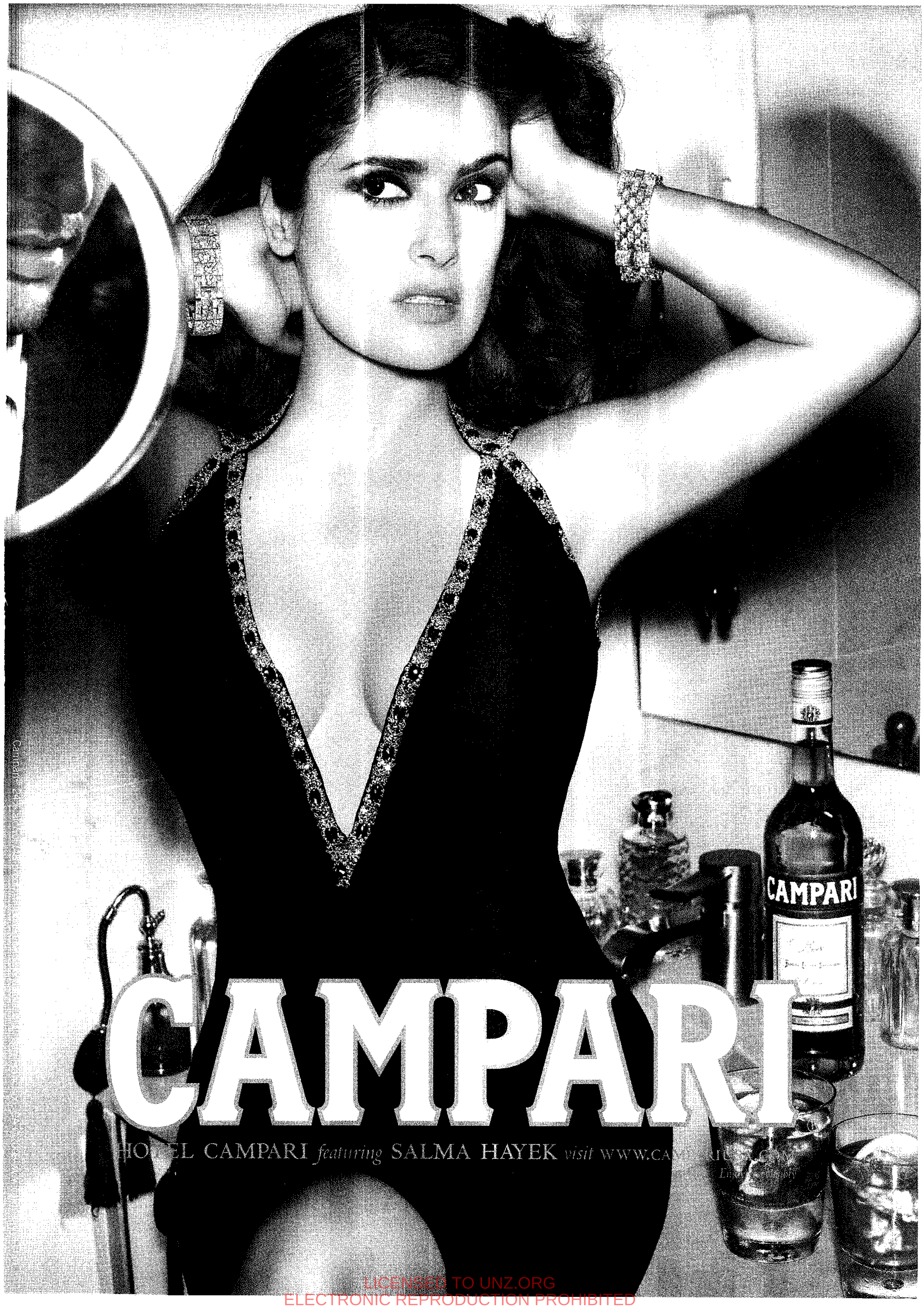
Sept. 16-Dec. 14

The reclusive Italian painter Giorgio Morandi, who died in 1964, did for bottles what Cézanne did for apples, transforming a banal subject into still-life paintings of luminous, almost mystical grace. The Met will survey Morandi's remarkable oeuvre in a major loan exhibition. (212-535-7710.)

NIGHT LIFE
BACK STOOP

Sept. 19-20

The fifth annual Brooklyn Country Music Festival brings Alex Battles, Andy Friedman, Jack Grace, and other local roots musicians to Southpaw. (www.brooklyncountrymusic.com.)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CAMPARI
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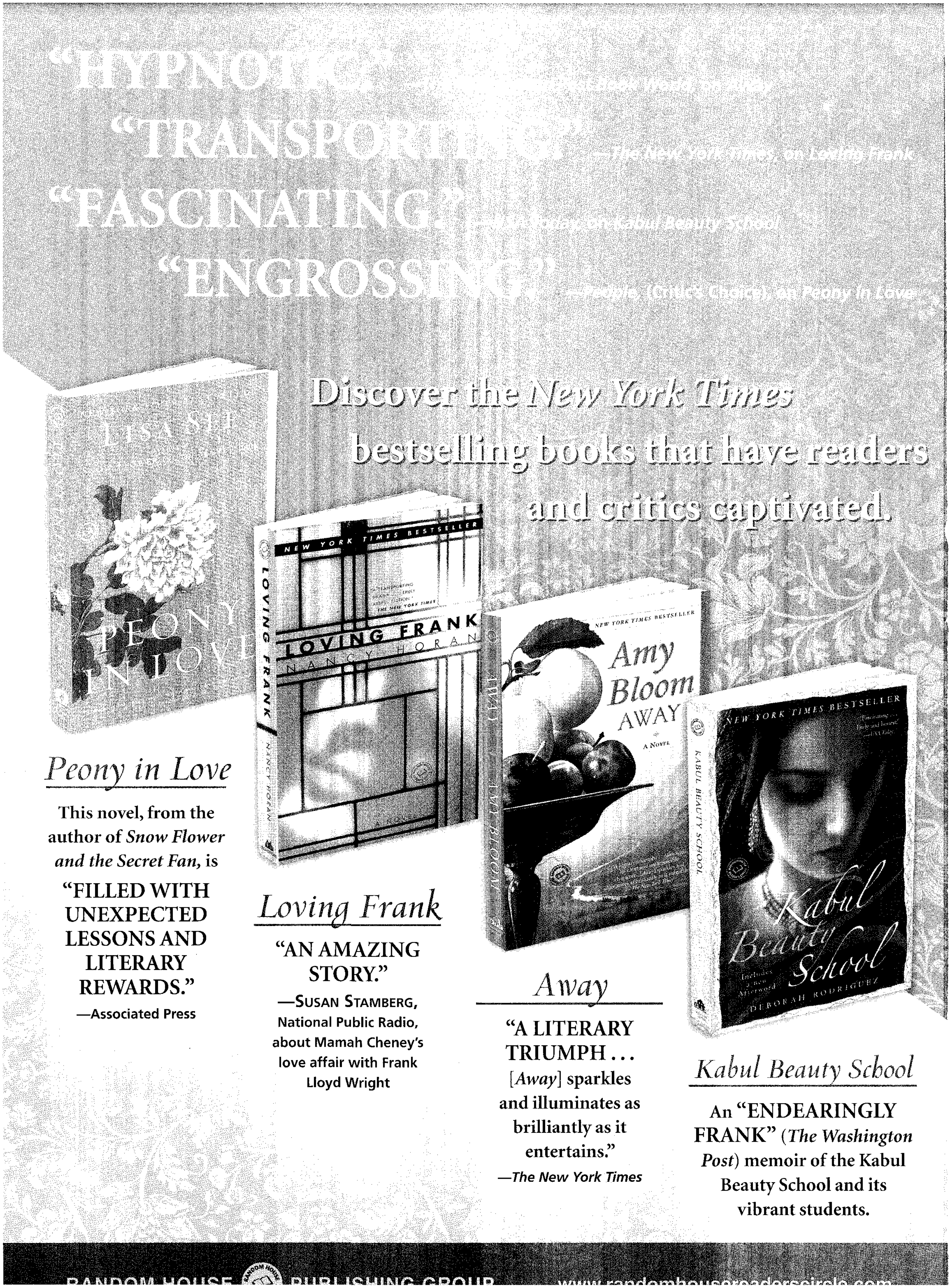

"HYPNOTIC." —[illegible] Book World, on Away

"TRANSPORTING." —The New York Times, on Loving Frank

"FASCINATING." —USA Today, on Kabul Beauty School

"ENGROSSING." —People, (Critic's Choice), on Peony in Love

Discover the *New York Times* bestselling books that have readers and critics captivated.

Peony in Love

This novel, from the author of *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan,* is

"FILLED WITH UNEXPECTED LESSONS AND LITERARY REWARDS."

—Associated Press

Loving Frank

"AN AMAZING STORY."

—SUSAN STAMBERG, National Public Radio, about Mamah Cheney's love affair with Frank Lloyd Wright

Away

"A LITERARY TRIUMPH . . . [*Away*] sparkles and illuminates as brilliantly as it entertains."

—*The New York Times*

Kabul Beauty School

An "ENDEARINGLY FRANK" (*The Washington Post*) memoir of the Kabul Beauty School and its vibrant students.

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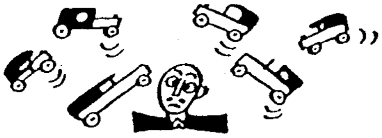
LISA SEE
PEONY IN LOVE
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
LOVING FRANK
NANCY HORAN
A NOVEL
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
Amy Bloom
AWAY
A Novel
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
Kabul Beauty School
DEBORAH RODRIGUEZ

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
CHANGING LANES

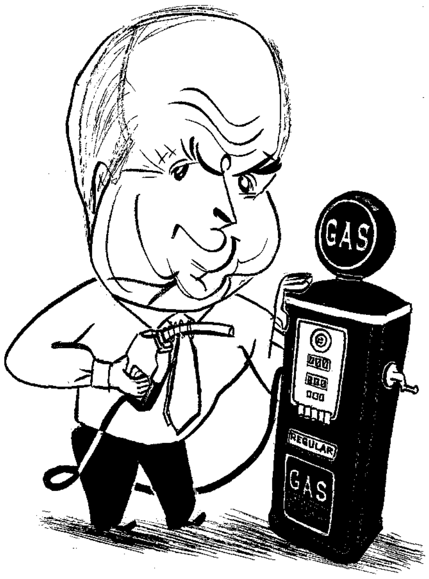


Late last month, Senator John McCain went up with a new television ad, titled "Pump." The ad begins no place in particular with a gasoline pump, circa 1965. "Gas prices—four dollars, five dollars," a female narrator intones, as the numbers on the pump's front panel spin. "No end in sight, because some in Washington are still saying no to drilling in America, no to independence from foreign oil.

"Who can you thank for rising prices at the pump?" the narrator asks. She leaves the question hanging, while a recording from a recent political rally grows louder and louder. "Obama! Obama!" the crowd screams.

How important is it for candidates to tell the truth? Throughout his long career in politics, McCain, who called his PAC Straight Talk America, has presented frankness as his fundamental virtue. If his positions—on campaign finance, on immigration reform, on the Bush tax cuts—were unpopular with either the White House or the Republican Party faithful, that just showed that he was willing to tackle the tough issues. When his campaign very nearly collapsed and then revived, in December, McCain attributed his rally not to the fact that voters liked what he was saying but to the fact that they didn't. "I've been telling people the truth, whether I thought that's what they wanted or not," he said. After his crucial victory in New Hampshire, in January, he again credited his candor: "I went to the people of New Hampshire to tell them the truth. Sometimes I told them what they wanted to know, sometimes I told them what they didn't want to know."

The past few weeks have seen a change in McCain. He has hired new advisers, and with them he seems to have worked out a new approach. He is no longer telling the sorts of hard truths that people would prefer not to confront, or even half-truths that they might find vaguely discomfiting. Instead, he's opted out of truth altogether.



"Well, that certainly didn't take long," the *Times* observed.

The sharp increase in gasoline prices—the national average for a gallon of regular hit a record high, of $4.11, on July 7th—has shown up in several recent voter polls as a top concern. In a CNN/Opinion Research survey released last month, seventy-seven per cent of respondents said that gas prices would be "extremely" or "very" important in their choice for President. An NBC/*Wall Street Journal* poll taken in mid-July put energy and gasoline prices just below "job creation and economic growth" but above the war as a priority for the government to address. Polls also show that a majority of Americans believe that more drilling for oil in the United States would alleviate the problem. The CNN/Opinion Research survey found that seventy-three per cent of Americans back increased offshore drilling—although President Bush recently lifted an executive moratorium on drilling in most coastal waters, a congressionally imposed moratorium remains in place—while a recent Los Angeles *Times*/Bloomberg survey showed sixty-nine per cent in favor of allowing drilling on currently protected federal lands. (Twelve per cent supported such a move even if it caused damage to "environmentally important areas.")

Of course, the results of these or any other public-opinion surveys do not alter the underlying reality. The Department of Energy estimates that there

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

are eighteen billion barrels of technically recoverable oil in offshore areas of the continental United States that are now closed to drilling. This sounds like a lot, until you consider that oil is a globally traded commodity and that, at current rates of consumption, eighteen billion barrels would satisfy less than seven months of global demand. A D.O.E. report issued last year predicted that it would take two decades for drilling in restricted areas to have a noticeable effect on domestic production, and that, even then, "because oil prices are determined on the international market," the impact on fuel costs would be "insignificant." Just a few months ago, McCain himself noted that offshore resources "would take years to develop." As the oilman turned wind farmer T. Boone Pickens has observed, "This is one emergency we can't drill our way out of."

If the hard truth is that the federal government can't do much to lower gas prices, the really hard truth is that it shouldn't try to. With just five per cent of the world's population, America accounts for twenty-five per cent of its oil use. This disproportionate consumption is one of the main reasons that the United States—until this year, when China overtook it—was the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases. (Every barrel of oil burned adds roughly a thousand pounds of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.) No matter how many warnings about the consequences were issued—by NASA, by the United Nations, by Al Gore, by the Pope—Americans seemed unfazed. Even as the Arctic ice cap visibly melted away, they bought bigger and bigger cars and drove them more and more miles.

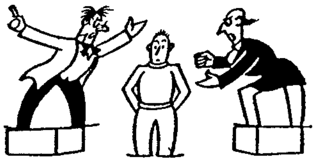
The impact of rising fuel prices, by contrast, has been swift and appreciable. According to the latest figures from the Federal Highway Administration, during the first five months of this year Americans drove thirty billion fewer miles than they did during the same period last year. This marks the first time in a generation that vehicle miles in this country have edged downward. All told, undriven trips since the start of 2008 amount to some thirty billion pounds of unreleased CO_2. Clearly, the only way to change America's consumption habits is by making those habits more expensive.

McCain, in his straight-talking days, acknowledged as much. In 2003, he broke with the Bush Administration and co-introduced legislation to reduce carbon emissions, by, in effect, imposing a price on them. That same year, over strong White House opposition, he brought the bill to the Senate floor. (It was defeated, by a vote of fifty-five to forty-three.) In an interview with this magazine, he said that he regarded the opposition to his proposal, largely from members of his own party, as a scandal. "I think it's a dramatic example of the influence of special interests here in the Congress," he said. "It's a combination of the utilities and the coal companies and automobile manufacturers—an unholy alliance of special interests that have made it a top priority to prevent any action being taken." He went on to say that he wasn't sure the American political system was up to dealing with the challenge of climate change. "How much damage will have been done before we act?" he asked.

Recent history suggests that Presidential campaigns don't reward integrity; the candidate who refuses to compromise his principles is unlikely to have a chance to act on them. Still, McCain's slide is saddening. That he has sunk to the level of "Pump" a full month before Labor Day really doesn't leave him—or the race—far to go.

—*Elizabeth Kolbert*

MATCHMAKERS
PURPOSE-DRIVEN HYPE

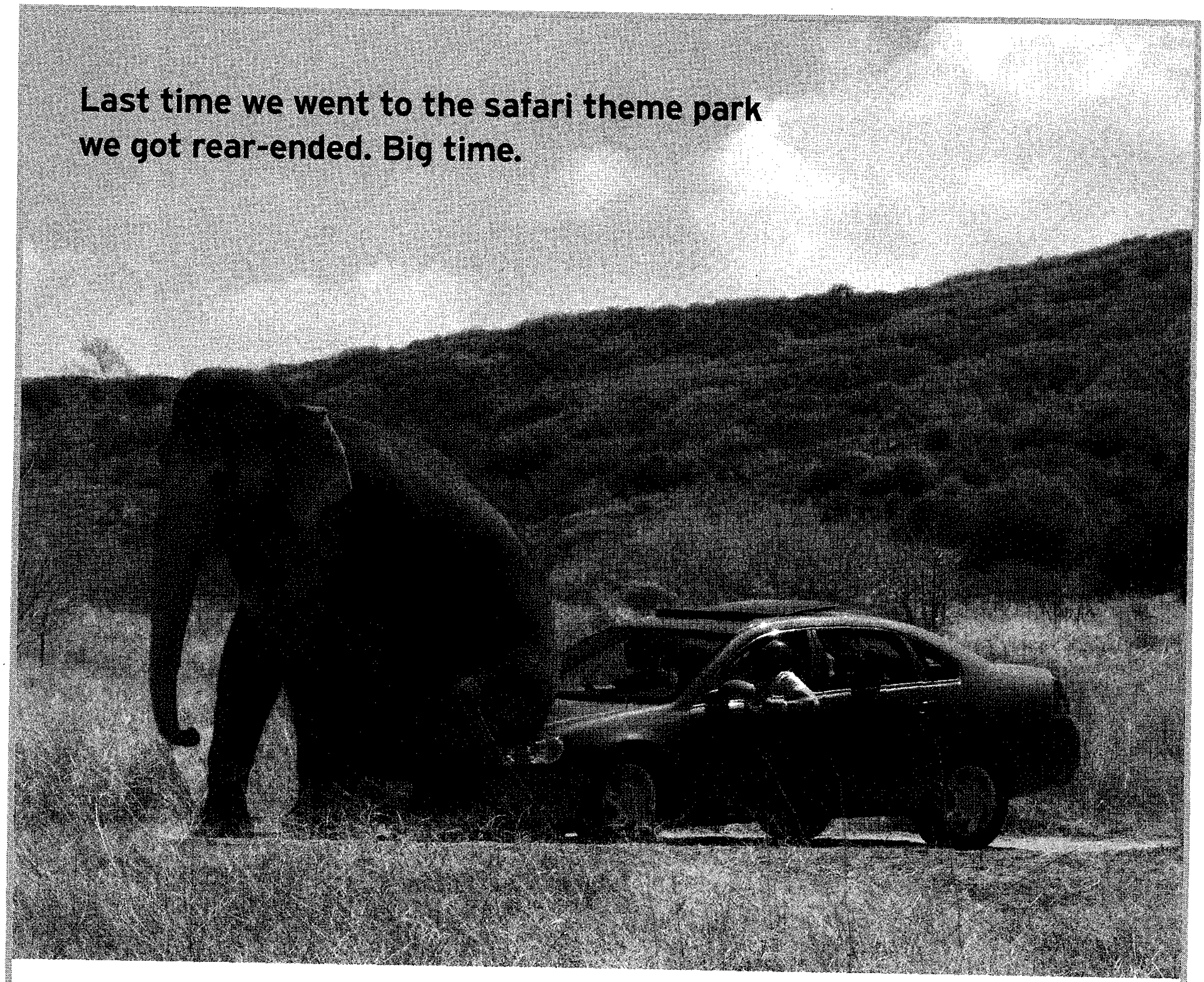


Go-betweens can attract as much attention as the factions they seek to reconcile: see Squanto (Pilgrims and Indians), Jimmy Carter (Egypt and Israel), Tookie Williams (Bloods and Crips), and the producers of the newly revived "Beverly Hills, 90210" (Jennie Garth and Shannen Doherty). The most prominent mediator of late is Pastor Rick Warren, who has wrangled John McCain and Barack Obama for their first joint appearance, to be held on August 16th at Saddleback Church, in Lake Forest, California. This is a coup, Warren acknowledged, speaking by phone the other day from São Paulo, Brazil, but he was circumspect about all the fuss. "I like to leave town when the news is about me," he said. "Usually when I'm overseas, somebody kills a judge and something happens like the hostage reads my book and turns himself in." Warren was referring to the fact that in 2005, while he was in Rwanda, a man who had shot three people in an Atlanta courthouse surrendered after taking a captive, who steered him to Warren's "The Purpose-Driven Life." (Later, she admitted that she also gave him crystal meth.)

Still, like any party promoter, Warren knows that a successful get-together needs a little hype. Billed as a "Civil Forum on Leadership and Compassion," the McCain/Obama event will occupy a prime slot: five to seven on a Saturday night. Dominating the church's Web site is a pop-up ad in the style of an old-timey woodcut poster, the type you might see announcing a Willie Nelson stand at the Ryman. McCain and Obama face off in three-quarter profile, as if tuning up for a battle of the bands. Warren plans to introduce the presumptive nominees together and then to interview each for an hour. He determined who will go first—Obama—with a coin toss.

The idea for the summit goes back to April, when Messiah College, in Grantham, Pennsylvania, invited the Presidential candidates to campus for a discussion of moral issues. Obama and Hillary Clinton showed up. McCain bagged it. "Along about June, they asked, 'Would you be interested in helping to host a second forum?' " Warren recalled. "Over the next month, it became clear that there was a stalemate between the campaigns. It was pretty much dead in the water." Warren, who doesn't make endorsements, called McCain and Obama—"good friends," both—on their cell phones. "I just went straight to the principals," he said.

Warren will be the evening's sole interlocutor. His style as a moderator seems less akin to the pointed tactics of George Stephanopoulos ("Do you think


Last time we went to the safari theme park
we got rear-ended. Big time.

The kids had been wanting to go to the drive-through safari since last summer. So we planned a day trip and used our Citi CashReturns℠ card to buy the tickets, some animal-themed clothing, a little car-friendly food and extra batteries for the camera. It was a good thing we had the camera, too, because we got some great shots of ostriches, a herd of wildebeests and a giraffe.

But the most memorable moment came when an elephant put his trunk through our sunroof. And his hindquarters through our hood. So we used the cash we got back to help pay for some much-needed body work.

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Reverend Wright loves America as much as you do?") or the pin-down technique of the late Tim Russert ("What can you tell me about the man who's going to be Mr. Putin's successor?") than to the Socratic approach that the ladies on "The View" employed with Michelle Obama ("You're not wearing panty hose?"). "These commentators pounce on every misstatement, every partial statement," Warren said. Under his questioning, the candidates will enjoy a "ten-per-cent grace factor." No stumpers. Warren said, "I always think, Aw, he didn't mean that."

Warren, who favors Hawaiian shirts over suits, wants "to sit down and do the sort of David Frost or the Charlie Rose interview," and he gave a preview of some of the topics he might broach. "In most debates, ninety-five per cent of the questions have had to do with hot-button political issues—it's the war, it's oil, it's the border, it's health care," he said, and explained that he finds these lines of inquiry "really quite short-term." He offered some alternatives. Q.: "Are you a leader or a manager?" Q.: "Tell me the most difficult decision you've ever had to make." Think Human Resources.

With Web pundits—the bookies of the political game—referring to the matchup as "The Rumble Before the Humble," it seemed like a good time to get Don King on the line. King, an enthusiastic supporter of President Bush, wouldn't say which candidate he's backing, but he offered a potential slogan for the showdown: "Remember Iowa!" (inspired, he said, by "Remember the Alamo"). Were King in charge, he'd fire up the public with a sort of historical-highlight reel: "I would remind them that when the water was over the portholes and John Paul Jones's ship was sinking, the British commanders yelled across the bow, 'Do you surrender?' and John Paul Jones retorted, 'I have not yet begun to fight!' Then I would take them to a town-hall meeting, where freedom echoed out through the chambers: 'Give me liberty or give me death.' Now you're getting like one fighter jumping on the other fighter and calling him out. You're calling out the heritage of this nation." He went on, "What you are selling is *America*. You've got excitement beyond belief."

—*Lauren Collins*

WIND ON CAPITOL HILL
BUDDY SONG

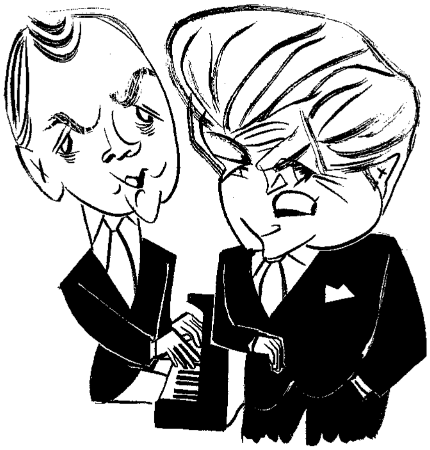
Several weeks ago, John McCain revealed his love for Abba, a confession that produced a campaign theme song ("Take a Chance on Me") and a number of parodies (one, on the Web site Jezebel, went "Gimme gimme gimme McCain after midnight"). The choice of Abba—brilliant or terrible?—was a reminder of how in political music (as in politics and in music) there can be a thin line between a flop and a sensation. Song selections have a way of backfiring, because of the lyrics ("Mambo No. 5," briefly in the running for the 2000 Democratic Convention, turned out to refer to a girl named Monica), or the songwriter's politics (Reagan/Bruce Springsteen), or something in between (Chaka Khan on her appearance at the Republican Convention in 2000: "I'm trying to forget about that").

So what about the prospects for "Headed Home," a tribute composed, this summer, by Senator Orrin Hatch (R., Utah) for Senator Ted Kennedy (D., Mass.)? The song, written to herald Kennedy's return to the Senate after he was given the diagnosis of a brain tumor, was reported to be under consideration for the Democratic Convention by the Boston *Globe*, which called it "lilting." Hatch, who has written more than three hundred songs, mostly religious music and patriotic numbers, came up with the lyrics to "Headed Home"; Philip Springer ("Santa Baby") wrote the music. In a demo recording, the jazz vocalist Tony Middleton—who has a deep, warbly voice, not unlike James Earle Jones's—sings of a metaphorical boat journey that ends with a call on Americans to honor Senator Kennedy: "Through the rain and fog/ We can find a clear day/ Shoo the shadows and doubts away/ And touch the legacy that is ours."

Last week, Hatch released the song as an MP3 (with a warning: "I am respectfully requesting that, if you choose to post the song on your company's Web site, you do so in a protected, streaming-only, non-downloadable format"), and the experts were divided on its chances. Greil Marcus, the music critic, said, "When it started, I thought, This isn't half bad. I like 'halfway to the stars' instead of 'all the way.' But"—he read the line about the storm—" 'touch the legacy that is ours'? You just can't use 'legacy' in a song. It's like a roadblock."

Oscar Brand, the longtime host of the radio show "Oscar Brand's Folksong Festival," declared, "It's a very good song." The metaphor, he noted, is an old one—"steering the ship of state." (See "With Roosevelt as the Skipper," written for F.D.R.; "Row On, Woodrow, Row On"; and "Get on the Raft with Taft"—a dangerous choice of vessel, since Taft weighed more than three hundred pounds.) Brand, humming his way through the song, stopped at the last verse, " 'On the reefs of despair we shall not crash.' What does that mean?"

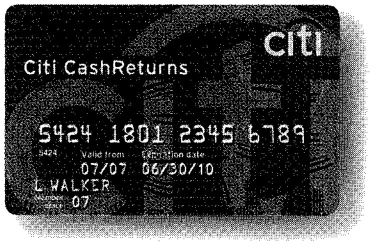
Senator Hatch, meanwhile, was in his office, preparing for a meeting with an intelligence analyst. He'd been playing the song for friends all week. "Everybody who hears it loves it," he said. The title, he said, had come from a phone conversation with Springer: "I was talking on my car phone, and I said, 'I'm headed home,' and he said, 'Hey, that's a good title for the song.' " The nautical imagery alludes to Kennedy's love of sailing, but it also reminded Hatch of the first song he ever wrote for the Senator—"Souls Along the Way," a love song commemorating Kennedy's second marriage, in 1992. Hatch recalled, "He came down to my office to chew me out about something, and I said, 'You're wrong, and I wrote you a song.' I gave it to him on a



Senators Orrin Hatch and Ted Kennedy

Cash back.

Lots and lots and lots of cash back.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cassette tape. Then, July 3rd, I got a call from Ted on his boat—it must have been a nice boat, because he called me from out there and told me he was listening to it, and his wife was crying. He said, 'It's beautiful.'"

Hatch wasn't optimistic about getting his new song into the Convention. He said, "Steny Hoyer"—the House majority leader—"told my staff they'll never play it, because it's got a double meaning." The title "Headed Home" sounds as though it could mean headed home to Heaven, but, Hatch said, "I meant that he was coming back to the Senate." Recently, Hatch sent an MP3 of the song to the Kennedys. About an hour later, Senator Kennedy called him again. "He said, 'Hey, Orrin, this is really wonderful.' I said I was worried that he'd misconstrued the meaning. And he said, 'No, don't worry about it. It's a good song.'"

—*Lizzie Widdicombe*

THE BOARDS
HIPPIE ROCK

James Rado has been spending a lot of time in Central Park lately, discovering that certain trees and the smell of hot dogs can be as evocative as an acid flashback. In 1967, Rado and his friend Gerome Ragni, both actors, wrote a musical, with the composer Galt MacDermot, about the kinds of people they saw on the street—the freaks, the draft dodgers, the dropouts—and took it to the Public Theatre. The next year, "Hair" moved to Broadway, with Rado playing Claude, the leader of a peacenik tribe. (Ragni died in 1991.) This week, a revival opens at the Delacorte, and Rado has found himself back in the Park, where protesters have been replaced by sunbathers and bridesmaids.

There is little in Rado's appearance—stringy blond locks, metallic-pink shades, indigo socks—to suggest his seventy-six years. When he arrived at the Delacorte the other Friday, to conduct a tour of the Park's hippie landscape, he was breathing into a red handkerchief, as if he'd just been teargassed. "I got poisoned in the bathroom," he said. "They were spraying the toilets with Clorox." Once recovered, he started walking south. Before the revival, he'd consulted an astrologer: "She said, 'You know, the chart for opening night is almost identical to the chart of Barack Obama.'"

Soon Rado arrived at the Sheep Meadow—"the place where the sixties happened," he said. He stopped at the edge of a footpath, furrowed his brow, and said, "If we concentrate real hard, we'll be able to walk through this fence." Then he strolled through an open gate.

Two stories: First, it's 1961. Rado lies down on a rock with his shirt off. "Suddenly, I felt a club hit my foot," he said. "I opened my eyes and there was a policeman standing over me saying, 'Put your shirt back on.'" Skip to 1967: Ten thousand people are in the Sheep Meadow for a Be-In. Suddenly, there's a commotion. "Gerry and I come over here—right here, to the highest point—and we see two guys who had taken their clothes off. They were just standing there, completely naked, with their arms at their sides. And the crowd was going wild." That was the inspiration, Rado said, for the "so-called nude scene" in "Hair."

But what Rado really wanted to point out was a large squarish rock on the south side of the field, on top of which a young man was sitting cross-legged. "There's where a hippie would be sitting with an Indian feather in his head," Rado said. "Now it's a guy with a cell phone. The unhippie." He yelled up to the kid.

HIPPIE: Excuse me. It so happens that this particular rock you're sitting on—

UNHIPPIE: You want my rock?

HIPPIE: No, we don't want it. We've already got it. It's ours. No, I'm kidding. But this rock: it isn't known by many people, but this is the Hippie Rock, because this was the center of the Be-Ins in New York.

The rock squatter apologized for not being a hippie but added that he had read "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance." After some questioning, it was learned that he was "aggressively avoiding employment" (Rado: "A hippie!") before starting law school in the fall (oh), and was living with his mother. "That's so funny," Rado said, "because that's exactly the situation in the play that I wrote. It's called 'Hair.' And the leading character is unemployed and he's living with his mother. Where does your mother live?"

"Toledo, Ohio."

"Oh, my God! So you're living in Toledo! Our character lives in Flushing, Queens."

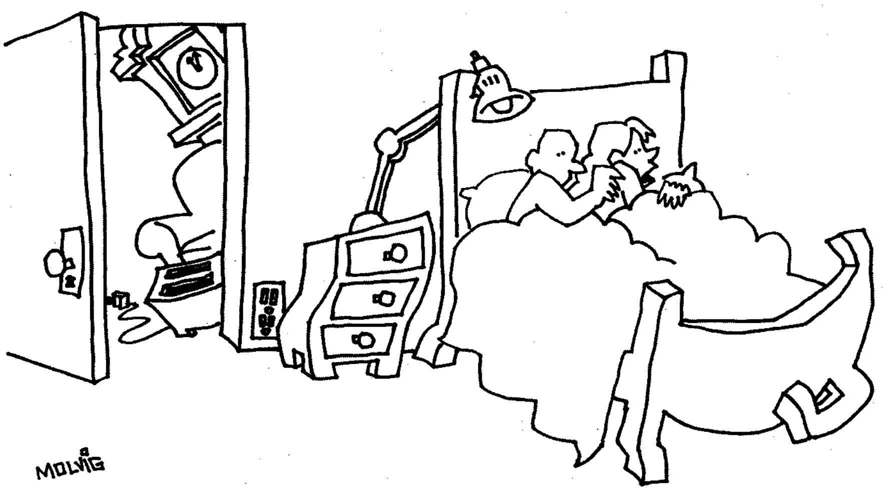
As a guardian of the Hippie Rock, the young man seemed cool enough. Rado offered him two tickets to "Hair" for the following night, which he accepted. "You really wrote that thing?" he said. "Who are you?"

"My name is Jim. Rado. R-A-D-O."

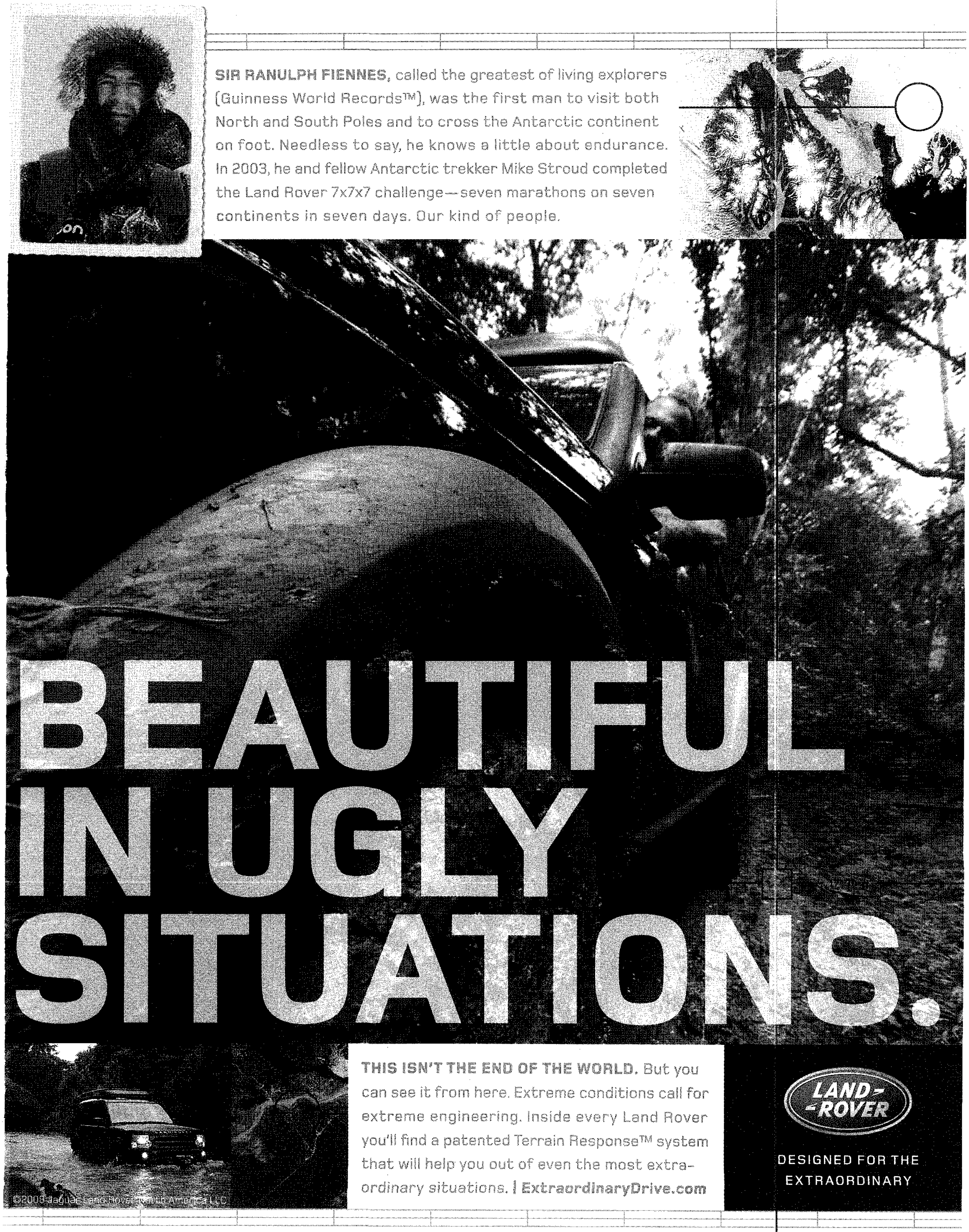
"I'm probably a philistine," the young man said.

Rado wasn't exactly sure what "philistine" meant, but he knew that it didn't bode well. "The philistines have taken over where the hippies once were," he said.

—*Michael Schulman*



"Not tonight. The furniture is sentient again."



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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE PERMISSION PROBLEM

In the second decade of the twentieth century, it was almost impossible to build an airplane in the United States. That was the result of a chaotic legal battle among the dozens of companies—including one owned by Orville Wright—that held patents on the various components that made a plane go. No one could manufacture aircraft without fear of being hauled into court. The First World War got the industry started again, because Congress realized that something needed to be done to get planes in the air. It created a "patent pool," putting all the aircraft patents under the control of a new association and letting manufacturers license them for a fee. Had Congress not stepped in, we might still be flying around in blimps.

The situation that grounded the U.S. aircraft industry is an example of what the Columbia law professor Michael Heller, in his new book, "The Gridlock Economy," calls the "anticommons." We hear a lot about the "tragedy of the commons": if a valuable asset (a grazing field, say) is held in common, each individual will try to exploit as much of it as possible. Villagers will send all their cows out to graze at the same time, and soon the field will be useless. When there's no ownership, the pursuit of individual self-interest can make everyone worse off. But Heller shows that having too much ownership creates its own problems. If too many people own individual parts of a valuable asset, it's easy to end up with gridlock, since any one person can simply veto the use of the asset.

The commons leads to overuse and destruction; the anticommons leads to underuse and waste. In the cultural sphere, ever tighter restrictions on copyright and fair use limit artists' abilities to sample and build on older works of art. In biotechnology, the explosion of patenting over the past twenty-five years—particularly efforts to patent things like gene fragments—may be retarding drug development, by making it hard to create a new drug without licensing myriad previous patents. Even divided land ownership can have unforeseen consequences. Wind power, for instance, could reliably supply up to twenty per cent of America's energy needs—but only if new transmission lines were built, allowing the efficient movement of power from the places where it's generated to the places where it's consumed. Don't count on that happening anytime soon. Most of the land that the grid would pass through is owned by individuals, and nobody wants power lines running through his back yard.

The point isn't that private property is a bad thing, or that the state should be able to run roughshod over the rights of individual owners. Property rights (including patents) are essential to economic growth, providing incentives to innovate and invest. But property rights need to be limited to be effective. The more we divide common resources like science and culture into small, fenced-off lots, Heller shows, the more difficult we make it for people to do business and to build something new. Innovation, investment, and growth end up being stifled.

Opportunities forgone aren't always easy to see. The effects of overuse are generally unmistakable—you can't miss the empty nets of fishing boats working overfished oceans, or the scrub that covers an overgrazed field. But the effects of underuse created by too much ownership are often invisible. They're mainly things that don't happen: inventions that don't get made, useful drugs that never get to market.

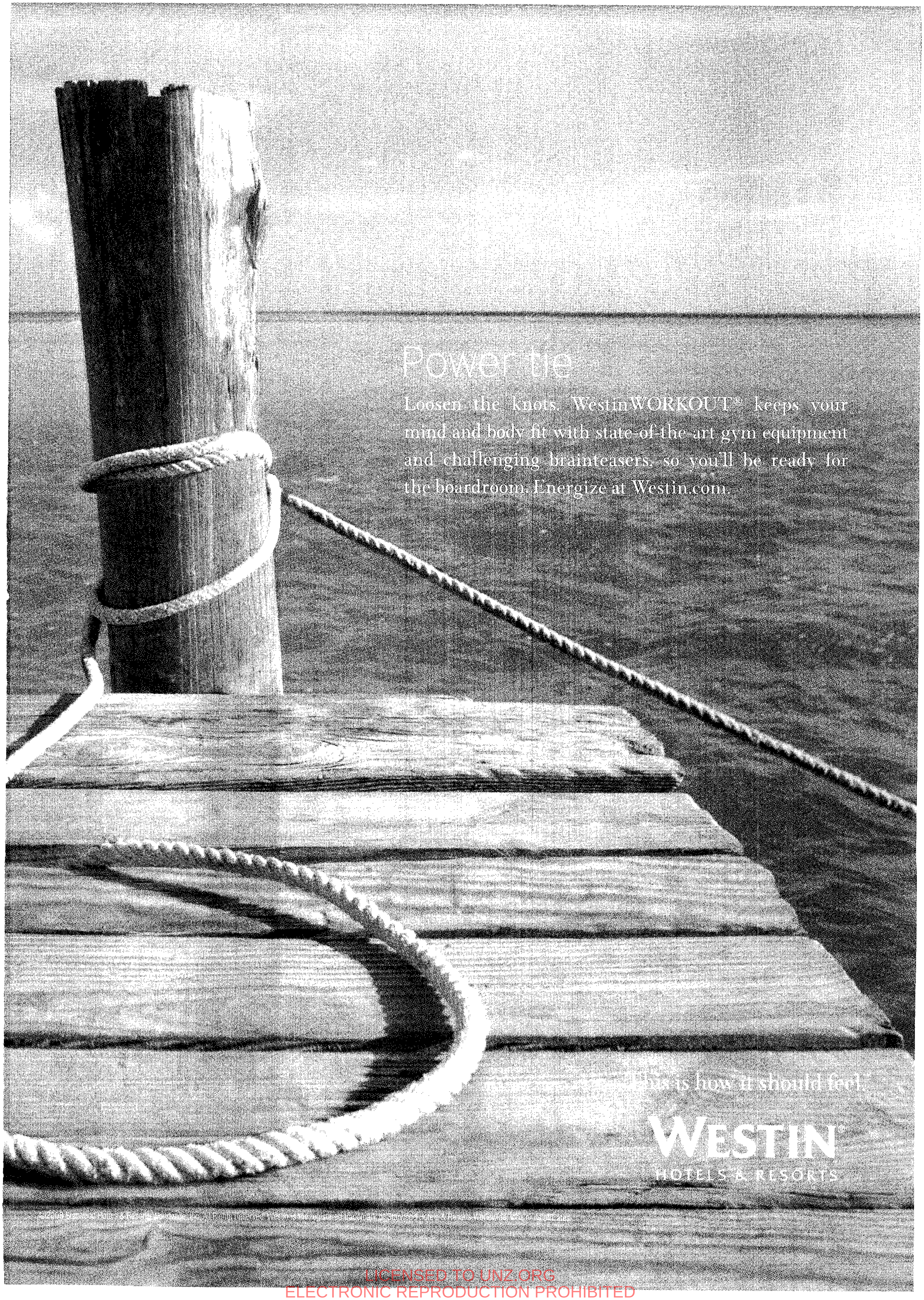
In theory, one should be able to break a gridlock by striking a deal that would leave all sides better off. Sometimes that happens. Just the other week, for instance, Nokia and Qualcomm settled a three-year-long patent battle, which could accelerate the spread of third-generation cell-phone technology here and in Europe. In a less contentious fashion, products like the DVD player quickly became mainstream and affordable because many companies worked together to form patent pools. Even the fact that there's music on the radio is the result of songwriters' collectively allowing two main groups, ASCAP and BMI, to handle the licensing of their songs to radio stations.

One reason deals founder is that there are simply too many interested parties. If, in order to create a new drug, you have to strike bargains with thirty or forty other companies, it's easy to decide that the price is too high. But often things go awry because owners won't make a deal at a reasonable price, as with America's nascent aircraft industry. Or take a problem that bedevils the oil-and-gas industry. When different companies own adjacent patches of an oil field, each will be tempted not only to drill its own patch but also to try to suck out the resources of its neighbor's patch. For geological reasons, overdrilling actually reduces the total amount of oil you can get out of the field—all sides end up worse off. An obvious solution is to have one company do the drilling and share the revenues with the other players. But, as the economics professor Gary Libecap has shown in a historical analysis, such agreements are often reached only belatedly, if ever.

Recent experimental work by the psychologist Sven Vanneste and the legal scholar Ben Depoorter helps explain why. When something you own is necessary to the success of a venture, even if its contribution is small, you'll tend to ask for an amount close to the full value of the venture. And since everyone in your position also thinks he deserves a huge sum, the venture quickly becomes unviable. So the next time we start handing out new ownership rights—whether via patents or copyright or privatization schemes—we'd better try to weigh all the good things that won't happen as a result. Otherwise, we won't know what we've been missing.

—*James Surowiecki*

MARC ROSENTHAL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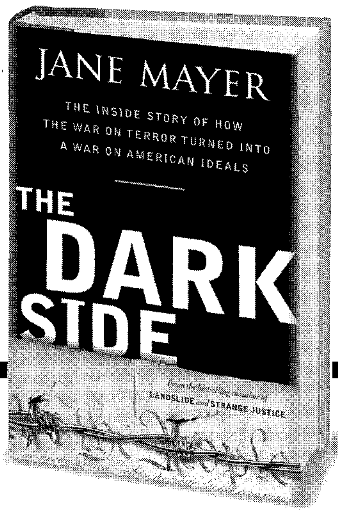
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LETTER FROM PLANT CITY, FLORIDA

THE STRAWBERRY GIRLS

Celebrating a new queen and her court.

BY ANNE HULL

One Sunday last February, a young woman named Kristen Smith left the parking lot of Bethany Baptist Church, in Plant City, Florida, and drove along a two-lane country road with a large gold crown on the seat beside her. The mossy pasturelands around Plant City—the winter strawberry capital of the world—were exploding with ripe fruit. Kristen was two weeks into her reign as the 2008 Strawberry Queen, and the crown was already causing severe headaches. It weighed nearly a pound and, even bobby-pinned on top of her thick chestnut hair, left a mark on her forehead, an affliction known among generations of Plant City Strawberry Queens as "the queen's dent." She was on her way to a lunch where she would be making her official début, and she was nervous.

Kristen, who is nineteen, was not a regular on the beauty-pageant circuit. She could eat a plate of ribs and two hours later be craving pork rinds or red-velvet cake. When her spirits flagged, she read Scripture. She drove a pickup truck, attended a Christian college, worked part-time as a waitress, and wanted to spend the rest of her life in Plant City, raising a family. Kristen Smith disproved the theory that the Strawberry Queen had to be the well-connected daughter of a town scion; her father repaired washing machines for a living. She looked like a young Bobbie Gentry, and she was just what Plant City was looking for in these modern times.

Along the road, mom-and-pop operators were selling flats of berries from tents and campers. One of the fruit stands favored by tour buses was doing such a business in shortcake that the whipped cream was pumped out by nitrous tanks. Fifteen per cent of the nation's strawberries are produced in Eastern Hillsborough County between December and April. Still, the Outback Steakhouses and the stucco subdivisions were getting closer, and the life that Plant City celebrated was vanishing, acre by acre. The coronation of a Strawberry Queen had come to seem almost an act of defiance.

Kristen pulled into the Red Rose Inn & Suites, a motor lodge off Interstate 4, whose marquee said "Queen's Luncheon." The purpose of the luncheon was to introduce Kristen, along with four other young women, who had been chosen to serve as members of the 2008 Strawberry Court, to the thirty or so women whose husbands run the Florida Strawberry Festival, in Plant City. These women are called "directors' wives," and, unofficially, they represented the traditions of the town.

The queen and her court made their entrance. Their dresses were modestly cut, their hair was teased, and they wore strawberry pendants, strawberry charms, strawberry bracelets, and strawberry barrettes. With white satin pageant sashes, they stood at the edge of the dining room, more tentative than triumphant. They seemed to grasp the magnitude of their role when one of the luncheon guests clasped her hands and, in a loud voice, said, "Are these *our* girls?"

I grew up in central Florida in the nineteen-sixties, barefoot half the time and running around the orange groves where my father worked. I remember flocks of white birds that would lift from the backs of cattle, disturbed by the jackhammers and bulldozers clearing land for Walt Disney World. Disney would never have what Plant City's Strawberry Festival had; we had the smell of hay and manure, the crêpe-paper float that, on parade day, carried five young women through archways of Spanish moss. I must have been seven or eight when I got to ride in the parade, holding a tinfoil wand and wearing tap

Court
Court
First Maid
Court
Queen

Amanda Sparkman, Britney Balliet, Shaunie Surrency, Jackie Raulerson, and Kristen Smith. Photograph by Brian Finke.

shoes from Jackie's School of Dance. The closest I came to true royalty was when my cousin Susie made the Strawberry Court, in 1984.

Returning home last February, I saw that the little country fair had become a six-million-dollar extravaganza featuring Top Forty country acts, like Alan Jackson, and drawing half a million visitors during its eleven-day run. Plant City still had the First Baptist Church, with its white-columned grandeur, but the Church of Scientology had recently moved in next to the old train depot. The mayor wore Prada slip-ons and lived in a gated subdivision that had a huge tiki bar. On the interstate, a three-story Tyrannosaurus rex, constructed out of fibreglass, hovered over the exit ramp, urging tourists to visit Dinosaur World.

Since the nineteen-fifties, rural Florida has marketed itself to Northerners and Midwesterners as an unexplored paradise of citrus and mermaids. My family owned a small orange business called Hull Groves, and my great-aunt Dot ran our fruit stand on Highway 60 in the winter months. One day, Lucille Ball showed up. She was wearing a large scarf that partly hid her face, but her voice was so familiar that a dog belonging to one of my cousins jumped into the back seat of her car. We had a machine that washed and polished the oranges to an improbable shine, and I used to watch the tourists drive away with their perfect fruit.

I saw the 2008 Strawberry Queen and her court as a last stand against the inevitable end of a place that defined them and me. Yet the strawberry girls saw themselves as part of a tradition that started in 1930 and would go on forever. Kristen tried to explain this at dinner one night in a Plant City restaurant. Her case was strengthened by the presence of Ruby Jean Redman, the 1953 Strawberry Queen, sitting a table away. The two women nodded to each other. "It's what joins the community together," Kristen said. "The way the world changes so much, you don't have to worry about this changing. It's just something we'll always have."

Five pageant judges had come from out of town to choose the queen and her court, on the basis of an interview, skill in public speaking, and how the contestants looked in evening wear and a modest one-piece bathing suit. The moment the queen and court were announced—Kristen, Shaunie Surrency, Britney Balliet, Jackie Raulerson, and Amanda Sparkman—the town laid gifts at their feet, ranging from loaner fox stoles for chilly nights at the festival to scholarship money, and free tanning sessions at Planet Beach. Some of the girls had grown up in 4-H or Future Farmers of America, and knew how to calm a half-ton steer (Shaunie's steer, a thousand-pound Black Angus named Paco, was entered in a festival competition). They usually introduced themselves by their church affiliation: "I'm Kristen Smith, I love organic peanut butter, and I go to Bethany Baptist Church."

The only one who didn't seem to be a true country girl was Jackie Raulerson, a five-foot-eleven sophisticate who looked like a runway model. Her high school was surrounded by cow pastures, but she wore chic trenchcoats with flipped-up collars to class. At public events, when other court members spoke of their desire to spend the rest of their lives in Plant City, Jackie said, "I'd like to come back—eventually." During the pageant interviews, most girls got easy questions from the judges, but Jackie was asked about immigration. Her answer was deft, and probably helped her win a place in the court: "Without laborers, the strawberry fields would be virtually impossible to farm. It would be horrible for the strawberry industry, and that's so close to my heart."

Each girl signed a contract agreeing to good morals and good behavior. Pregnancy or marriage was grounds for dismissal. Last year's queen was a stunning beauty, named Summer Pippin, who resembled a young Nancy Sinatra. The boutique owner who sold Summer her pageant gown had said, "Summer, you look like you're sex on a stick, and they don't go for that in Plant City." Summer almost had to abdicate when she didn't graduate on time with her high-school class.

Kristen said that she'd made it to nineteen without being kissed. She went on road trips to Passion plays on Friday nights. Her idea of small talk was probing someone on the finer points of baptism. "Do y'all sprinkle or do immersion?" she asked. It was hard to resist her raspy-voiced effervescence, or her enthusiasm when she discovered sautéed mushrooms or Tae Bo workout videos. But Kristen was a killer competitor. She claimed that she competed for the strawberry throne to win the three-thousand-dollar scholarship, although she had spent twenty-eight hundred dollars on her pageant gown. Her big concern was the bathing-suit competition. "It's an opportunity for lust," she said. "Why do you have to flaunt yourself in public?" She consulted a former Strawberry Queen and finally decided that she was O.K. with wearing a swimsuit on a public stage because it showed that she believed in good nutrition and fitness.

Kristen lived with her parents, ten miles out in the country, in a concrete ranch house. An above-ground pool in the back yard overlooked hacked-up grazing land. As queen, she had taken a quick course in etiquette and learned that steak should be cut one bite at a time instead of sawed up all at once. She studied YouTube videos to become familiar with the country stars who would be performing. As the festival approached, events piled up, and often it was after midnight when she pulled into her driveway. Then she

DOUBLE-DARE YOU, DUDE. DOUBLE-DOUBLE-DOUBLE-DARE YOU.
ZIEGLER
THE RIVALRY BEGINS

had to start the process of washing and drying her long hair. Kristen was beginning to suffer from sleep deprivation, and she knew that she needed to find a solution. That's when a cosmetologist friend named Nancy Rupp stepped in.

Mrs. Rupp, as she was called by everyone, moonlighted in funeral homes, "fixing the hair of loved ones," as she put it, which is how she came up with the idea of styling Kristen's hair while she slept. Kristen began spending the night in a spare bedroom at Mrs. Rupp's house.

Mrs. Rupp, a slightly built woman with dark hair and a faraway voice, was not keen on publicity. "We all do what we can to help," she said. "It's just an honor to be able to help Kristen. She's our queen." Her daughter also went to Bethany Baptist. I arrived one morning around daybreak, as a sandhill crane plucked its way toward a drainage ditch in the silvery darkness, and saw a single light on inside the house. Mrs. Rupp was in the kitchen finishing her coffee. "It's time," she said, and she walked past an enormous red ball gown that hung in the hallway and toward a closed bedroom door. She knocked lightly. Kristen was sleeping with her head at the foot of the bed, allowing her hair to hang down over the mattress. Mrs. Rupp plugged in a curling iron and knelt on the floor. She worked over the hair with long brush strokes. By the time she started with the curlers, Kristen was yawning and stretching her arms.

"I'm so bad when I go to funeral homes," Mrs. Rupp said softly. "I'll spend an hour and a half. It's my time with them."

Kristen was still sleepy. "If you think about where they are going, it's a celebration," she said.

For decades, the Strawberry Queen program was overseen by a volunteer chaperone who made sure that the girls got to their events on time and looked good in public. The dressing area at the Strawberry Festival was a tent or a trailer with unreliable plumbing, and the wardrobe included such items as velvet capes with strawberry appliqués. But in 2001 a woman named Sandee Sytsma, who had worked for the Tampa Electric Company for two decades, took over as coördinator. She raised the G.P.A. requirements for pageant applicants, increased the program budget to twenty thousand dollars, brought in hair and makeup stylists, and scheduled more appearances around town. Angry mothers hunted her down in the beauty parlor to complain about the strict new standards, but Sytsma believed that the program needed a major overhaul to stay alive.

"The shine of the crown was not as bright as it once was," Sytsma told me. "I wanted to build it back up." Sytsma, who is known as Miss Sandee to the girls, is sixty and a perfect size 2, and tends to reapply her lipstick after sipping a cup of coffee. She went at her volunteer job like a C.E.O. Her immaculate Jeep Grand Cherokee usually contained five red sequinned cowboy hats, five cha-cha dresses, and five pairs of black jeans with a strawberry on the back pocket. Sytsma made no secret of her agenda: Britney Spears was the dark template against which she fought. She wanted young ladies who could represent small-town values circa 1958.

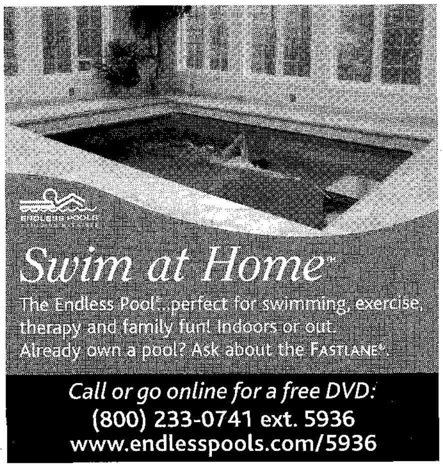
"I can't believe they still make teenagers like this," a woman told Sytsma after meeting this year's court. "They do in Plant City," Sytsma replied.

Sytsma inherited her marketing sense from her father, Roy Parke, Jr., a legendary local strawberry grower. Parke owned a red Cadillac and had a swimming pool shaped like a strawberry. His produce stand, Parkesdale Farm Market, was the Liberace of fruit stands. Tour buses jammed the parking lot during the strawberry harvest, and customers posed for photographs while sitting in a big red papier-mâché throne and wearing a crown. Shortcakes and shakes, the best in the county, were devoured in a glitzy picnic area called the Garden of Eatin'.

Two days before this year's Strawberry Festival started, Sytsma rounded up the girls at dawn to visit several radio stations in Tampa, twenty-five miles away. They travelled in a white van with strawberries painted on the side, and Sytsma used the time to prep the girls for their radio appearances. "O.K., what's new at the festival this year?"

"Swimming pigs," Kristen guessed, but the Paddling Porkers had been around for a while.

They arrived at the Clear Channel



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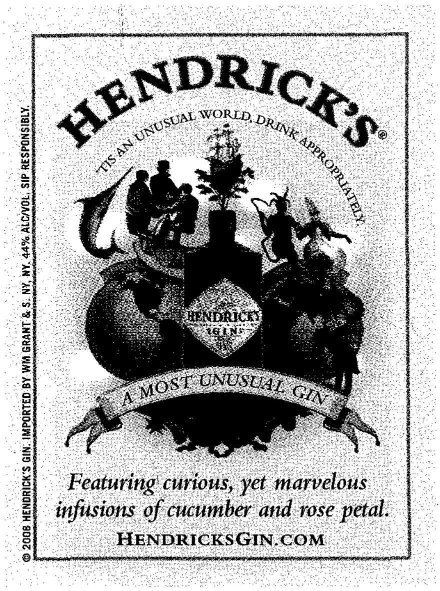

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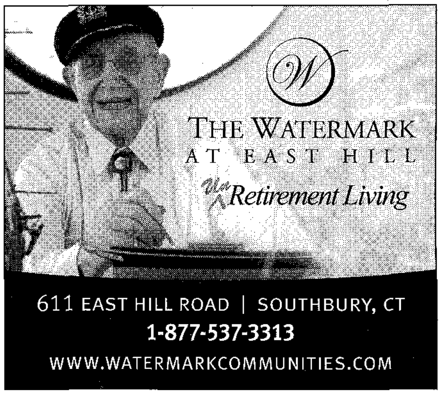
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studios just before seven, the girls shivering as Sytsma grabbed a flat of berries from the back seat. Employees moved down the main hallway drinking coffee, but even the groggiest of them got out of the way for this sugary apparition. "You guys need to go see the Sports Animal at 620," one man said. The girls waited outside the 98 Rock studio, peering through the window at d.j.s sporting Lucifer goatees and tongue studs. Two female mannequins in black bikinis were propped in a corner. One of the tech guys, looking a little frantic, came out. "We had some girls who were supposed to show up and we're in a bind," he said. "We need girls for our bit."

The Strawberry Court drew near, but Sytsma intervened. "And what would that be?'"

"They are basically licking pieces of food, and they are supposed to decide what kind of food it is."

Catching sight of Kristen moving toward the open studio door, Sytsma yelled, "No, Kristen!"

Something about the Strawberry Court girls seemed to make men want to test them. Down the hall at a studio with a hay bale outside the screen door, where a country show was being broadcast, the girls huddled around a live microphone. "The most important question," a d.j. said. "When are you taking on last year's crew in the milking competition?"

The host asked which court member was showing a steer this year, but the other d.j. wouldn't let up. "In a fair fight, which could win, this year's court or last year's court? Any hair pullers? Kickers? Biters?" Afterward, Sytsma hustled them out to the parking lot, and they returned to the safety of Plant City. They stopped at Chick-Fil-A for breakfast and prayed before unwrapping their biscuits, or, in Jackie's case, a multigrain bagel.

On the road, Sytsma pulled up to a toll booth. The female attendant looked beaten down, but Sytsma always sensed the possibility of self-improvement and, before she hit the gas, said, "Cute hair!"

That afternoon, I went to the empty fairgrounds to visit the expo hall that housed the Parade of Queens exhibit, a room filled with gold-framed photographs of past Strawberry Queens and Courts. The panorama of faces began with Charlotte Rosenberg, the first queen, in 1930, and wrapped around three walls. I looked for my cousin Susie, once a tomboy who liked to ride ponies through the groves. Her father, a strict Baptist, had objected to her competing in the pageant, because he thought it would corrupt a young girl's soul, but Susie, a blue-eyed beauty with the feathered bangs of a Charlie's Angel, won, and there was her picture with the 1984 court. It was a point of pride in Plant City to have a relative on the wall.

In 1968—the year that local public schools and hospitals began to integrate—Marian Richardson became the first African-American to compete for the court. Dozens of Richardson's relatives and friends attended the pageant, but she was cut in the second round. Since then, only one black girl has made the court: Essie Cecille Dixon, who was among several black teen-agers competing in 1973. Dixon, the daughter of a single mother, couldn't afford the suit she needed for the swimsuit competition; a former teacher helped pay for it. A young white woman who ran a local teen-fashion board coached Dixon and told her to keep her eyes on the judges and imagine victory. "When I walked out there, I wasn't a poor black girl living in the projects—I was a model," Dixon says. Now fifty-one, she is a retired public-school teacher who works as a server at Denny's. She lives on Laura Street, in an older black neighborhood, two blocks from the railroad tracks that, in my childhood, separated black from white. Dixon and her husband, Ronald, earn extra income by working eight-dollar-an-hour jobs at the Strawberry Festival, and each year Dixon slips off to the Parade of Queens room to look at her photograph on the wall.

ATTABLED WITH THE SPINNING YEARS

Does it mean one thing with work,
one with age, and so on?
Or are the two opposing doors
irrevocably closed? The song that started
in the middle, did that close down too?
Just because it says here I like tomatoes,
is that a reason to call off victory? Yet it says,
in such an understated way, that this is a small museum
of tints. I'm barely twenty-six, have been on "Oprah"
and such. The almost invisible blight
of the present bursts in on us. We walk
a little farther into the closeness we owned:
Surely that isn't snow? The leaves are still on the trees,
but they look wild suddenly.
I get up. *I guess I must be going.*

Not by a long shot in America. Tell us, Princess A-Line,
tell us if you must, why is everything territorial?
It's O.K., I don't mind. I never did. In a hundred years,
when today's modern buildings look inviting
again, like abstract bric-a-brac, we'll look back
at how we were cheated, pull up our socks, zip
our pants, then smile for the camera, watch
the birdie as he watches us all day.
His thematically undistinguished narrative gives no
cause for complaints, does one no favors.
At night we crept back in, certain of acquittal
if not absolution, in God's good time, whose scalpel redeems us
even as the blip in His narrative makes us whole again.

—*John Ashbery*

By 2000, Latinos had surpassed blacks as the largest minority group in Eastern Hillsborough County, owing to the influx of farmworkers. In 2006, a Mexican-American teen-ager named Ilene Chavez—the daughter of field workers who had come to Plant City to pick berries—was chosen for the Strawberry Court. Light-skinned and fine-boned, Chavez had hired a pageant coach, added blond highlights to her hair, and borrowed a St. John Knits suit for the competition. "I so wanted to be a part of it," Chavez said.

This year, the barrier was broken again, although that wasn't apparent until the festival's kickoff parade. Parade day began with a 7 A.M. breakfast at the First Baptist Church, for a few hundred growers and ranchers, after which the members of the 2008 court dashed off to change into red gowns. As they got ready, Kristen, between gulps of tea, read motivational notes from members of her church. "Hey, guys, I have some Scripture for us, Philippians 4:6-7," she announced, but the girls were so used to her praying that they kept on spraying their hair.

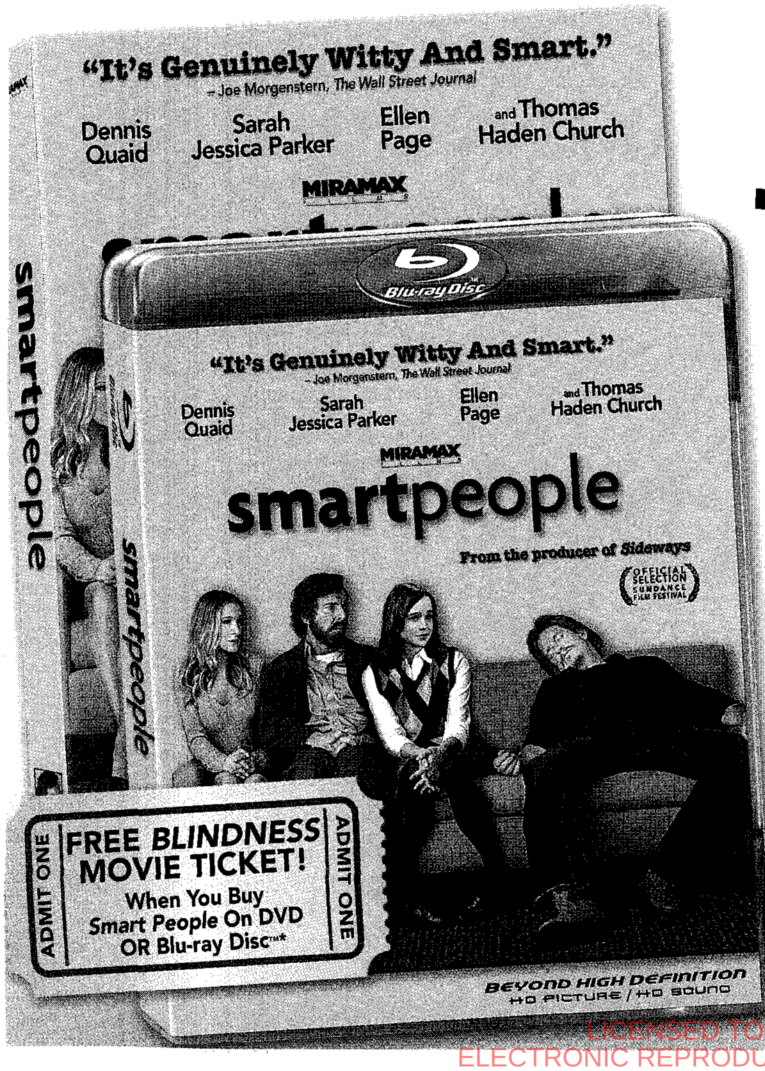
"Hey, Britney, stop hogging that curling iron, I got six pounds of hair!" Shaunie said to her friend, who was swaying to a country-music song playing on a boom box and staring at herself in the mirror.

Around lunchtime, the girls got on their float, which was parked behind the Gro-More fertilizer store. Miss Sandee told them to drink plenty of water and to use sunscreen. Mrs. Rupp appeared with an old JVC video camera. High-school marching bands tuned up nearby. Finally, the strawberry float lurched forward.

Thousands of spectators stood along the old brick streets of downtown. Lawn parties were humming, with Crock-Pots and aluminum pans of cobbler resting on wobbly card tables in the shade near the azalea bushes. Tangy clouds of barbecue smoke drifted in the breeze. Members of First Baptist were on one side of Reynolds Street, and members of First Presbyterian occupied the other. The Diamond Fertilizer float was blasting Lynyrd Skynyrd. A black gospel float was piping out praise tunes. There were Barack Obama T-shirts and Mike Huckabee T-shirts. Almost everyone stood when the R.O.T.C. passed with the flag. "The big city is coming, but we are trying to get them used to how we do things," a man named Jon Belk said, holding a soft drink. "Plant City is the slow life. That's the way we like it. You come here and the clocks stop. You can hear trains in the background, and cows."

The parade route passed through a historic area of bungalows with wraparound porches, and then travelled west toward the Dairy Queen in a Latino neighborhood, where teen-agers in ranchero belts and unlaced Timberlands sat on the grass. As the queen and the court approached, an elderly couple in folding chairs waved excitedly. The silver-haired man smiled as he rose up and shouted, "Hi, *mi hija!*"

The couple were Amanda Sparkman's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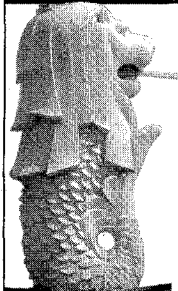

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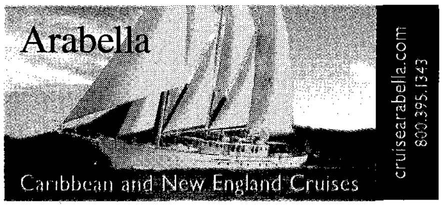

grandparents, Benjamin and Sara Rodriguez. The Rodriguezes had come to Plant City from Texas to pick strawberries in the early nineteen-eighties, and their daughter had married an Anglo from an old Plant City family. *Their* daughter was the eighteen-year-old on the float. Amanda wore green contacts, raised steers and hogs, and was the resident country-music expert; she was also the only one who had a box of congratulatory notes written in Spanish. "Even if you didn't win first place, you accomplished a beautiful victory," her grandfather wrote.

The girls climbed down from the parade float that afternoon, and from then on they could not escape the virtual giant mosh pit of the Florida Strawberry Festival, where on a good day fifty thousand visitors came through the turnstiles.

"We look good," one of them said, as they got ready.

"We look hot," another said.

"We look country."

Kristen quickly learned how to resist exploitation. When a photographer asked her to dip her finger in whipped cream and playfully taste it, she managed to remove any suggestion of sexual innuendo from the stunt and turned it into a Martha White flour commercial. Everything about the festival was G-rated except for a Trick Daddy song about ballas, dealas, and hustlas that blared from a stomach-churning ride by the name of Ecstasy. A ministry group called S.O.S. (Serving Our Savior) ran a booth that asked festival-goers, including the Strawberry Court, about their salvation.

"Because I recognize Jesus Christ as my savior!" Britney said.

Jackie greeted the public with a big smile, as if she were about to show off a real-estate listing—"I'm Jaclyn, it's nice to see you." One night after a buffet of fried chicken and black-eyed peas, she stepped into an elevator, closed her eyes as she leaned against the back wall, and said, "I am so tired of country food. I don't think God wanted me to be Southern. I love ethnic food. They look at me as if I were a gargoyle if I order unsweetened tea." Yet Jackie was often the first to arrive at an event, eager to put on her sash.

One afternoon, Jackie rushed toward me and leaned in close. "Miss Anne, your zipper is down!" she whispered. As I started to remedy the situation, the others surrounded me. In their world, a lady retreated to the bathroom for such duties. To make up for the awkwardness, they complimented my white pants. "You know, those would look so cute with a little white fitted jacket with cap sleeves, heels, a polo shirt, and big earrings," Jackie said.

"And red lipstick!" Amanda added. That night, I went to sleep wondering where I could find a jacket with cap sleeves.

No matter how intense the Florida heat, the girls always looked fresh. Their base of operations was a locker room called the Palace. It was full of clothes, wet wipes, hair spray, hot rollers, curling irons, gummy bears, and potpourri. Each girl had a makeup mirror surrounded by dozens of snapshots. A chaperone was always present, usually an older woman who passed the time in a chair by the door, knitting or reading. Boyfriends and mothers were not allowed in. In exhaustion, the girls sometimes piled on the couch together like puppies and fell asleep. One would invariably wake up and say, "Let's get pedicures," or "I want boiled peanuts!"

Eventually, the façade of perfection started to crack. One of the girls let the "f" word slip out. Britney Balliet let loose some atomic belches. Jackie went temporarily insane and smeared lipstick all over her face. She said she missed the smell of Nordstrom.

"Jack, you're such a nutcase," Amanda said.

Twice a day, they went backstage to meet the country stars who would be performing in the afternoon and evening at the thirteen-thousand-seat open stadium on the fairgrounds. In the old days, people like George Jones and Loretta Lynn would be hanging around a simple wire fence, waiting to go on. Today's stars, in their two-thousand-dollar boots, love playing at the festival, because it embodies everything their songs are about, but they sometimes seem nonplussed when they encounter five country girls in matching outfits who step forward to present a flat of strawberries. One day, the girls went backstage and spotted the singer Blake Shelton bending over a mixer board. He was wearing a snap-front Wrangler shirt and a grungy Hoyt cap. They all shook hands, and

Shelton mentioned that he'd just flown in from Las Vegas.

"How old do you have to be to go there?" Kristen asked.

Shelton paused, almost embarrassed—unsure whether Kristen was joking. Then he grinned. "Can I wear your crown tonight?" he said. "That would be hot."

One afternoon, when the crowds had been thinned out by rain, the girls and Miss Sandee traipsed across the muddy fairgrounds to the livestock tents. Shaunie, a delicate girl with doleful blue eyes, was scheduled to show her steer later that night. On their way to the tents, they passed a demonstration area that featured a BMX and skateboard ramp, along with a little trailer where the skaters hung out between shows. The girls had noticed a stunt rider named Austin Coleman, who had smooth chocolate skin and short dreadlocks that he kept under a knit cap. "Miss Sandee, can we go talk to him?" one of them asked, breathlessly. Coleman was already sauntering toward them, eating a rice cake.

"We're going to see Shaunie's steer," Britney said. "Wanna come?"

Coleman shrugged. "Sure. Is it going to do something?"

The girls led him into the steer tent, where he hung back from the bray and stink of the beasts, while the girls kept going forward, even Jackie.

Coleman, a twenty-four-year-old graduate of the University of Southern California, viewed the queen and the court with a sociological fascination. "I feel it's outdated," he said. "I see these girls walking around and I'm, like, 'Wow, what are these girls gonna be doing in two years?' They are not strongly opinionated about anything going on outside of Plant City."

Britney, for instance, lived with her mother and father on the same street as four of her aunts; her grandparents lived one pasture behind her house. "I would be an outcast if I moved away," she said. "I don't think I'd be able to move away and not know anyone. It's kind of hard to describe." I knew what she meant; when I was twelve, and my parents' marriage ended, my mother took my brother and me to live in another part of Florida, in a town of retirees who played shuffleboard and bought shiny fruit. I understood why the strawberry girls never wanted to leave their fields and fences.

Miss Sandee decided that the girls should look elegant for that evening's stadium concert, so they put on their strapless ball gowns and wore their hair swept up; the fox stoles rested on their shoulders. Along with the chaperones, they were escorted by sheriff's deputies to reserved seats. The evening performer was Tom Jones. He was oiled and coppery, wearing tight pants and a shirt open over his chest. The girls watched him with looks of stunned horror; Britney and Amanda bit their lips, trying not to giggle. Then lingerie started flying toward the stage. Britney shrieked when a pair of panties landed

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near her feet. Kristen, curious, picked them up and read a note that was attached. Later, Tom Jones and his tight pants were all the talk. Someone asked, "Kristen, did you see?"

Kristen was leaning into the mirror. She laughed. "See what?"

The last Saturday night of the festival, there was an auction in the steer tent. Hundreds of locals staked out places in the bleachers, bringing along blankets and thermoses. Future Farmers of America and 4-H kids, wearing blue corduroy show jackets, gave last-minute brush-outs to their animals. The smells of hay and manure were joined with those of soap and cologne. I spotted my great-uncle Roy sitting on the bottom row of the bleachers. He is ninety-four, and his big leathery hands were propped on a metal walker. His wife, Dot, who ran the family fruit stand, died ten years ago, and his orange groves had been killed off by disease, like many thousands of others in central Florida in the past decade. The trees that had shaded my childhood were now a flat open space that Roy leased to strawberry growers and protected from developers. He was sitting next to my cousin Susie, who still had her Charlie's Angels hair, although now it was dusted with gray.

A bell rang to signal the start of the auction. The first items were prize strawberries grown by local farmers. The queen and the court, wearing fitted jeans and high boots, entered the ring. They lifted flats of berries above their heads and, like warriors, paraded around as the auctioneer trilled off numbers. The steers were next.

Shaunie had been morose and jittery all day. She seemed no match for Paco as she stood in the chute waiting for her number to be called. But once they were in the ring Paco followed Shaunie's every direction, his hooves sinking into the sand as she nudged him along. The bidding held at five dollars a pound; Paco was bound for the packinghouse. Shaunie skipped her duties with the court that night; she insisted on spending those last hours with Paco in his pen, lying on the hay until her mother picked her up, around midnight.

On Sunday afternoon, the festival's final day, the girls arrived at the Palace subdued, even melancholy. The end of the festival meant an end to escorts through town, sirens at full blast, flashbulbs going off. They would resume the routines of school and jobs—Britney at a day-care center, Amanda as a cashier at the Sweetbay grocery store—and Wednesday-night church. In the fall, new girls would sign up to compete for the next court. Miss Sandee was already lobbying for a radical change in the pageant: she wanted to do away with the swimsuit competition, and, eventually, she succeeded.

In the Palace, the girls were sprawled on the floor, wearing faded jeans and signing heartfelt tributes to each other on poster board. Britney wrote to Amanda, her classmate at the community college, "You are my favorite and I love you with all my heart. Yay! Harvard Community College."

"Hi, darlings," Jackie announced as she breezed in. "What's wrong with everyone?"

I wandered over to visit the Parade of Queens exhibit again. A skinny teenage girl was staring up at the 1954 queen, Ruth Shuman. "I know her," the girl, whose name was Chelsea Myers, said. "My mom works for her—cleans her house—and I pull her weeds." Myers moved on to Kristen and the 2008 court. "They'll probably do really good in life," she said.

Sugarland was playing a concert at three-thirty, and it was a sellout. The sky was blue and cloudless, and the sun illuminated everything into dazzling clarity. There were cowboy hats and trucker hats and girls in T-shirts and tank tops that said "Got Berries?" or "Plant City FFA: Keepin' It Rural." Half the stadium stood up and sang along when Sugarland played "Who Says You Can't Go Home." Mrs. Rupp filmed it all with her JVC, and I spotted several former Strawberry Queens in the V.I.P. seats. The 2008 queen and court were in the front row, wearing sunglasses and looking untouchably glamorous in the last few hours of their eminence. Jackie was crying. Kristen's eyes were closed and her arms were swaying in the air, palms up, as if she were at church, and she was smiling broadly. ♦

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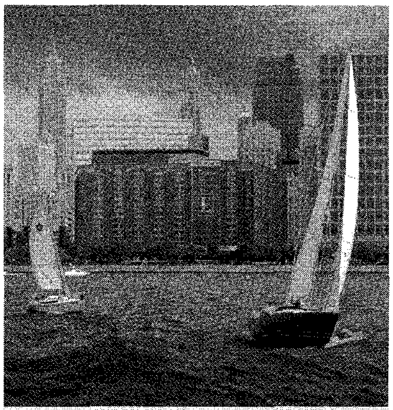

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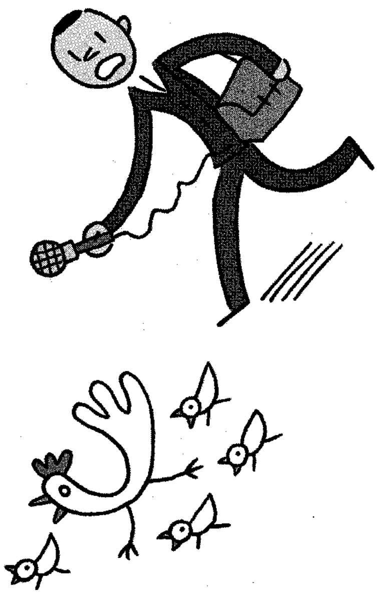
POLLSTER REPORTS NIGHTMARE

BY BRUCE McCALL

A CBS/*Pravda*/*Farmer's Almanac*/"Avatar: The Last Airbender" poll released today indicates that yesterday never happened for seventy-two per cent of all respondents, but, if it had, thirty-two per cent more Independents believe now than just last May that Barack Obama and John McCain are both leading in a race now too lopsided to call. Analysts observed that the poll was taken in a light drizzle at 4 A.M. E.D.T., before the high-income segment is awake, prompting observers to analyze the results as skewing in favor of CBS.



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McCain pollsters claimed that the same survey, conducted five minutes after a New Orleans *Times-Picayune*/Bravo/*Popular Mechanics* poll among women age twenty to twenty-one who are not men, found that ninety-seven per cent of respondents were too far away to be interviewed. The impact of current economic concerns on Obama's popularity among bipolar white prison inmates with less than a kindergarten education was not measured, but the person responsible for designing the poll has been fired because prison inmates cannot vote.

Surprising many veteran pollsters as these results were tallied—given that it has yet to be conducted—was a Hartford *Courant*/CNN/Starbucks poll to be taken by qualified voters who, an earlier ABC/Sacramento *Bee*/Publishers Clearing House straw poll predicted, expect a win for either the Democrats or the Republicans come November, unless Congress acts. Recent polls show that more women than men believe otherwise, by a majority of at least three to one.

Yet, in answer to the question "Would you go before a firing squad to protect higher pollen counts?," fewer than .03 per cent of those who identified themselves as likely McCain voters understood the question. By a plurality of four to one and counting, not counting those who did not, the Undecideds squared off in a donnybrook with the Don't Knows, broken up by the Have No Opinions Worth Mentioning. The I Forgets stood on the sidelines.

In sharp contrast to last year's similar polling question, conducted by the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles for Indiana State University, only seventy-five per cent of respondents this year thought "with certainty" that they were being interviewed. The same seventy-five per cent also reported "moderate to severe" memory loss, a seeming rebuff to the well-financed pro-forgetfulness lobby.

Cheering the Obama camp, particularly after his Middle East visits, a Fox News/Toronto *Star*/Amway poll, released but not yet caught, charts a severe downturn in support for efforts not to not repeal the NAFTA treaty. But the influence on French public opinion of the marriage of President Nicolas Sarkozy and international hottie Carla Bruni will have to wait until tomorrow.

Meanwhile, the normally reliable Quinnipiac University poll was travelling and was unavailable for comment. ♦

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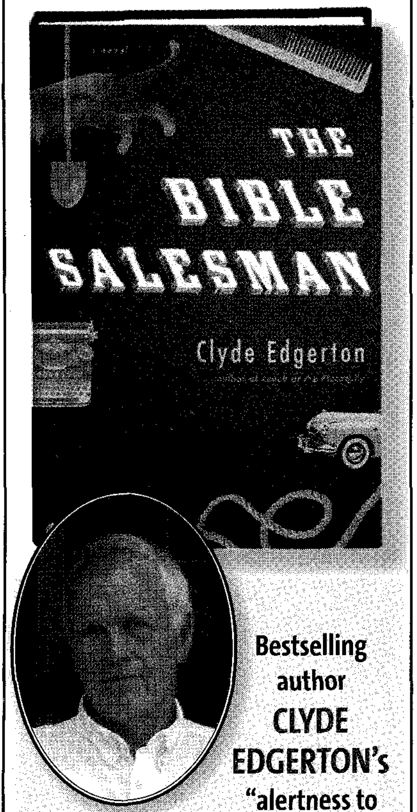

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MEDICAL DISPATCH

SUPERBUGS

The new generation of resistant infections is almost impossible to treat.

BY JEROME GROOPMAN

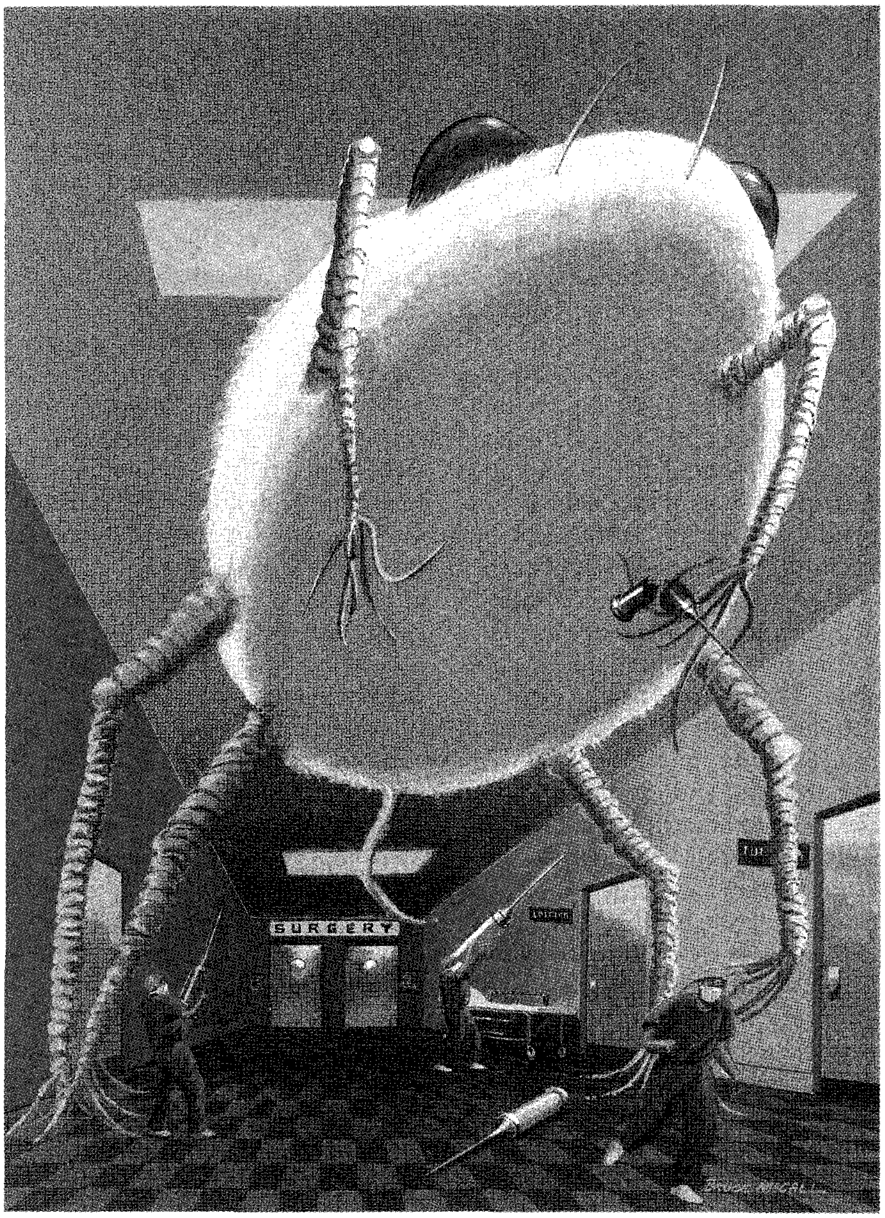
In August, 2000, Dr. Roger Wetherbee, an infectious-disease expert at New York University's Tisch Hospital, received a disturbing call from the hospital's microbiology laboratory. At the time, Wetherbee was in charge of handling outbreaks of dangerous microbes in the hospital, and the laboratory had isolated a bacterium called *Klebsiella pneumoniae* from a patient in an intensive-care unit. "It was literally resistant to every meaningful antibiotic that we had," Wetherbee recalled recently. The microbe was sensitive only to a drug called colistin, which had been developed decades earlier and largely abandoned as a systemic treatment, because it can severely damage the kidneys. "So we had this report, and I looked at it and said to myself, 'My God, this is an organism that basically we can't treat.'"

Klebsiella is in a class of bacteria called gram-negative, based on its failure to pick up the dye in a Gram's stain test. (Gram-positive organisms, which include *Streptococcus* and *Staphylococcus*, have a different cellular structure.) It inhabits both humans and animals and can survive in water and on inanimate objects. We can carry it on our skin and in our noses and throats, but it is most often found in our stool, and fecal contamination on the hands of caregivers is the most frequent source of infection among patients. Healthy people can harbor *Klebsiella* to no detrimental effect; those with debilitating conditions, like liver disease or severe diabetes, or those recovering from major surgery, are most likely to fall ill. The bacterium is oval in shape, resembling a TicTac, and has a thick, sugar-filled outer coat, which makes it difficult for white blood cells to engulf and destroy it. Fimbria—fine, hairlike extensions that enable *Klebsiella* to adhere to the lining of the throat, trachea, and bronchi—project from the bacteria's surface; the attached microbes can travel deep into our lungs, where they destroy the delicate alveoli, the air sacs that allow us to obtain oxygen. The resulting hemorrhage produces a blood-filled sputum, nicknamed "currant jelly." *Klebsiella* can also attach to the urinary tract and infect the kidneys. When the bacteria enter the bloodstream, they release a fatty substance known as an endotoxin, which injures the lining of the blood vessels and can cause fatal shock.

Tisch Hospital has four intensive-care units, all in the east wing on the fifteenth floor, and at the time of the outbreak there were thirty-two intensive-care beds. The I.C.U.s were built in 1961, and although the equipment had been modernized over the years, the units had otherwise remained relatively unchanged: the beds were close to each other, with I.V. pumps and respirators between them, and doctors and nursing staff were shared among the various I.C.U.s. This was an ideal environment for a highly infectious bacterium.

It was the first major outbreak of this multidrug-resistant strain of *Klebsiella* in the United States, and Wetherbee was concerned that the bacterium had become so well adapted in the I.C.U. that it could not be killed with the usual ammonia and phenol disinfectants. Only bleach seemed able to destroy it. Wetherbee and his team instructed doctors, nurses, and custodial staff to perform meticulous hand washing, and had them wear gowns and gloves when attending to infected patients. He instituted strict protocols to insure that gloves were changed and hands vigorously disinfected after handling the tubing on each patient's ventilator. Spray bottles with bleach solutions were installed in the I.C.U.s, and surfaces and equipment were cleaned several times a day. Nevertheless, in the ensuing months *Klebsiella* infected more than a dozen patients.

In late autumn of 2000, in addition to pneumonia patients began contract-ing urinary-tract and bloodstream infections from *Klebsiella*. The latter are often lethal, since once *Klebsiella* infects the bloodstream it can spread to every organ in the body. Wetherbee reviewed procedures in the I.C.U. again and discovered that the Foley catheters, used to drain urine from the bladder, had become a common source of contamination; when emptying the urine bags, staff members inadvertently splashed infected urine onto their gloves and onto nearby machinery. "They were very effectively moving the organism from one bed to the next," Wetherbee said. He ordered all the I.C.U.s to be decontaminated; the patients were temporarily moved out, supplies discarded, curtains changed, and each room was cleaned from floor to ceiling with a bleach solution. Even so, of the thirty-four patients with infections that year, nearly half died. The outbreak subsided in October, 2003, after even more stringent procedures for decontamination and hygiene were instituted: patients kept in isolation, and staff and visitors required to wear gloves, masks, and gowns at all times.



Doctors *fear that dangerous bacteria may become entrenched in hospitals.*

BRUCE McCALL

"My basic premise," Wetherbee said, "is that you take a capable microörganism like *Klebsiella* and you put it through the gruelling test of being exposed to a broad spectrum of antibiotics and it will eventually defeat your efforts, as this one did." Although Tisch Hospital has not had another outbreak, the bacteria appeared soon after at several hospitals in Brooklyn and one in Queens. When I spoke to infectious-disease experts this spring, I was told that the resistant *Klebsiella* had also appeared at Mt. Sinai Medical Center, in Manhattan, and in hospitals in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Cleveland, and St. Louis.

Of the so-called superbugs—those bacteria that have developed immunity to a wide number of antibiotics—the methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, is the most well known. Dr. Robert Moellering, a professor at Harvard Medical School, a past president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, and a leading expert on antibiotic resistance, pointed out that MRSA, like *Klebsiella*, originally occurred in I.C.U.s, especially among patients who had undergone major surgery. "Until about ten years ago," Moellering told me, "virtually all cases of MRSA were either in hospitals or nursing homes. In the hospital setting, they cause wound infections after surgery, pneumonias, and bloodstream infections from indwelling catheters. But they can cause a variety of other infections, all the way to bacterial meningitis." The first deaths from MRSA in community settings, reported at the end of the nineteen-nineties, were among children in North Dakota and Minnesota. "And then it started showing up in men who have sex with men," Moellering said. "Soon, it began to be spread in prisons among the prisoners. Now we see it in a whole bunch of other populations." An outbreak among the St. Louis Rams football team, passed on through shared equipment, particularly affected the team's linemen; artificial turf, which causes skin abrasions that are prone to infection, exacerbated the problem. Other outbreaks were reported among insular religious groups in rural New York; Hurricane Katrina evacuees; and illegal tattoo recipients. "And now it's basically everybody," Moellering said. The deadly toxin produced by the strain of MRSA found in U.S. communities, Panton-Valentine leukocidin, is thought to destroy the membranes of white blood cells, damaging the body's primary defense against the microbe. In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recorded some nineteen thousand deaths and a hundred and five thousand infections from MRSA.

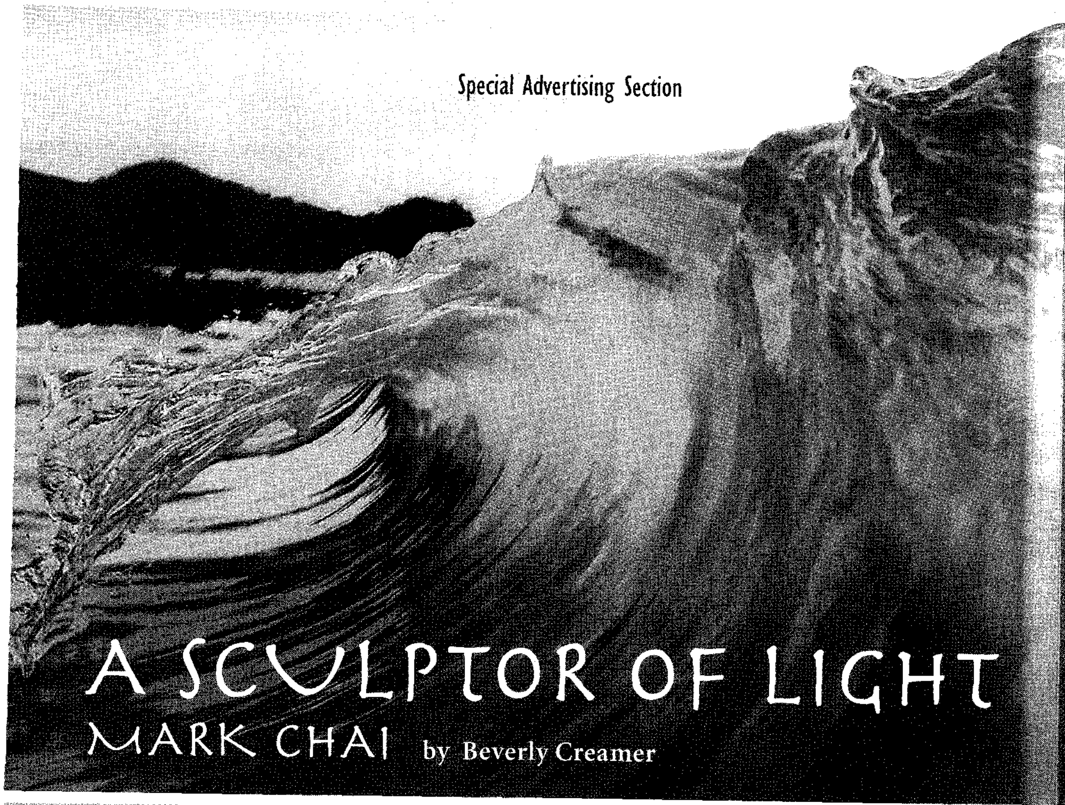
Unlike resistant forms of *Klebsiella* and other gram-negative bacteria, however, MRSA can be treated. "There are about a dozen new antibiotics coming on the market in the next couple of years," Moellering noted. "But there are no good drugs coming along for these gram-negatives." *Klebsiella* and similarly classified bacteria, including *Acinetobacter*, *Enterobacter*, and *Pseudomonas*, have an extra cellular envelope that MRSA lacks, and that hampers the entry of large molecules like antibiotic drugs. "The *Klebsiella* that caused particular trouble in New York are spreading out," Moellering told me. "They have very high mortality rates. They are sort of the doomsday-scenario bugs."

In 1968, Moellering travelled to Malaita, in the Solomon Islands. "I was really interested to see whether we could find an antibiotic-resistant population of bacteria in a place that had never seen antibiotics," Moellering said. The natives practiced head-hunting and cannibalism, and were isolated as much by conflict as by the island's dense jungle. Moellering identified microbes there that were resistant to the antibiotics streptomycin and tetracycline, which were then in use in the West but had never been introduced clinically on Malaita. Later studies found resistant bacteria in many other isolated indigenous human populations, as well as in natural reservoirs like aquifers.

Before the development of antibiotics, the threat of infection was urgent: until 1936, pneumonia was the No. 1 cause of death in the United States, and amputation was sometimes the only cure for infected wounds. The introduction of sulfa drugs, in the nineteen-thirties, and penicillin, in the nineteen-forties, suddenly made many bacterial infections curable. As a result, doctors prescribed the drugs widely—often for sore throats, sinus congestion, and coughs that were due not to bacteria but to viruses. In response, bacteria quickly developed resistance to the most common antibiotics. The public assumed that the pharmaceutical industry and researchers in academic hospitals would continue to identify effective new treatments, and for many years they did. In the nineteen-eighties, a class of drugs called carbapenems was developed to combat gram-negative organisms like *Klebsiella*, *Pseudomonas*, and *Acinetobacter*. "They were, at the time, thought to be drugs of last resort, because they had activity against a whole variety of multiply-resistant gram-negative bacteria that were already floating around," Moellering said. Many hospitals put the drugs "on reserve," but an apparent cure-all was too tempting for some physicians, and the tight stewardship slowly broke down. Inevitably, mutant, resistant microbes flourished, and even the carbapenems' effectiveness waned.

Now microbes are appearing far outside their environmental niches. *Acinetobacter* thrives in warm, humid climates, like Honduras, as well as in parts of Iraq, and is normally found in soil. An article published in the military magazine *Proceedings* in February reported that more than two hundred and fifty patients at U.S. military hospitals were infected with a highly resistant strain of *Acinetobacter* between 2003 and 2005, with seven deaths as of June, 2006, linked to "*Acinetobacter*-related complications." In 2004, about thirty per cent of all patients returning from Iraq and Afghanistan tested positive for the bacteria. "It's a big problem, and it's contaminated the evacuation facilities in Germany and a lot of the V.A. hospitals in the United States where these soldiers have been brought," Moellering said. Patients evacuated to Stockholm from Thailand after the 2004 tsunami were often infected with resistant gram-negative microbes, including a strain of *Acinetobacter* that was resistant even to colistin, the antibiotic used, to variable effect, in the outbreak at Tisch Hospital. The practice of "clinical tourism," in which patients travel long distances for more advanced or more affordable medical centers, may introduce resistant microbes into hospitals where they had not existed before.

Meanwhile, antibiotic use in agricultural industries has grown rapidly. "Seventy per cent of the antibiotics administered in America end up in agriculture," Michael Pollan, a professor of journalism at Berkeley and the author of "In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto," told me. "The drugs are not used to cure sick animals but to prevent them from getting sick, because we crowd them together under filthy circumstances. These are perfect environments for disease. And we also have found, for reasons that I don't think we entirely understand, that administering low levels of antibiotics to animals speeds their growth." The theory is that by killing intestinal bacteria the competition for energy is reduced, so that the animal absorbs more energy from the food and therefore grows faster. The Food and Drug Administration, which is often criticized for its lack of attention to the risks of widespread use of antibiotics, offers recommended, non-binding guidelines for these drugs but has rarely withdrawn approval for their application. A spokesman for the Center for Veterinary Medicine at the F.D.A. told me that the center "believes that prudent drug-use principles are essential to the control of antimicrobial resistance." A study by David L. Smith, Jonathan Dushoff, and J. Glenn Morris, published by *PLoS Medicine*, from the Public Library of Science, in 2005, noted that the transmission of resistant bacteria from animal to human populations is difficult to measure, but that "antibiotics and antibiotic-resistant bacteria (ARB) are found in the air and soil around farms, in surface and ground water, in wild-animal populations, and on retail meat and poultry. ARB are carried into the kitchen on contaminated meat and poultry, where other foods are cross-contaminated because of common unsafe handling practices." The researchers developed a mathematical model that suggested that the impact of the transmission of these bacteria from agriculture may be more significant than that of hospital transmissions. "The problem is that we have created the perfect environment in which to breed superbugs that are antibiotic-resistant," Pollan told



A SCULPTOR OF LIGHT

MARK CHAI

by Beverly Creamer

As the neighborhood begins to stir just after sunrise, Mark Chai drags the white kayak from behind his garage workshop and heads barefoot to the ocean a hundred yards away. Gliding across a calm Kailua Bay off O'ahu, he peers through turquoise water at coral formations or darting fish. On a lucky morning, a green sea turtle will lazily lift its head.

Looking out onto the bay, Chai, an artist of Hawaiian and Chinese ancestry, says, "It's so mesmerizing and soothing. If I were away from the ocean for a long time I'm sure my art would be less tranquil."

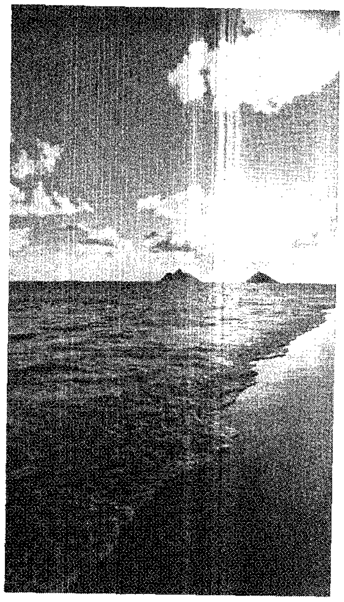
Back in his workshop, Chai replicates sea and sky. Bold sculptural pieces, perfectly engineered lamps, shelves, and tables all resonate with the beauty of Hawai'i. The surface of a wooden table ripples like an offshore current. Glowing lamps echo the shape of shampoo ginger, a flowering plant common in the Islands. His imagination running wild, Chai cuts the outlines of surfers from recycled plastic sheets to create luminarias, tucking the edges together like Chinese takeout cartons.

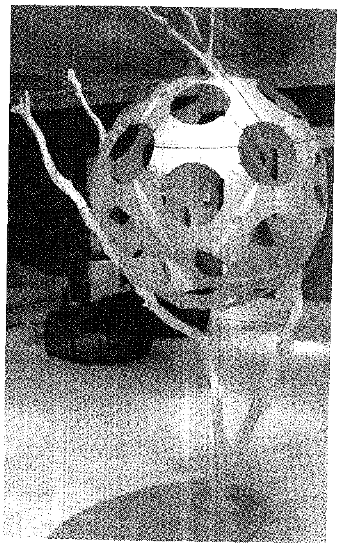
"I'm fascinated with how light comes through a material," he says, rummaging among a clutter of cardboard prototypes. "Or how it comes in the morning, or at twilight, or over the Ko'olau mountains." On a long cutting surface, Chai fashions a swirl from a thin slab of dappled lychee wood.

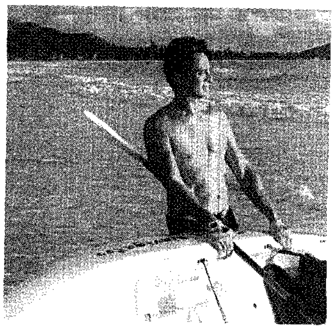
Often, his sculptures have patterns reminiscent of the sea, an influence from surfing. "In high school I shaped a couple of surfboards and got into body surfing," he says. "I loved watching the water curl over me." Eventually, Chai began to wonder, "How do you sculpt wood to look like waves?"

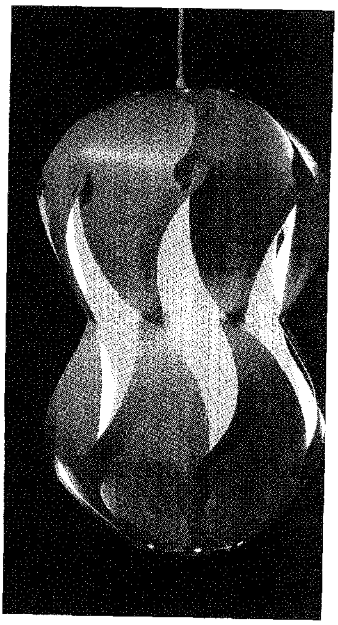
Mango and koa wood, guava and kiawe all become part of his smoothly flowing sculptures. In one, a small piece of gleaming native koa is carved into a heart. In another, a budding flower is delicately fashioned from mango. Chai even collected the trimmed limbs from a friend's tree, stripped the bark, and turned the gnarled shape into an arching hanging lamp stand. "We've got to start doing things to preserve our world, to connect ourselves back to the things important to us," he says.

With fans already tracking down his work in places such as the Into boutique tucked away in Honolulu's Chinatown, or the Fishcake home-furnishings store and art gallery near Ward Avenue, or the Shop at HiSAM in the new Hawai'i State Art Museum, Chai finds more and more satisfaction in showcasing Hawai'i's unique environment. On his living-room wall is a favorite quote: "Let your heart guide you. It whispers. So listen closely."









PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: WAVE BREAK ©JOSH BORANIAN; KAILUA BAY ©TOMAS DEL AMO/ ALAMY; SCULPTURE, MARK CHAI; LAMP ©MARK CHAI; BACKGROUND LEHUA PAPA ©SAM 'OHU GON III

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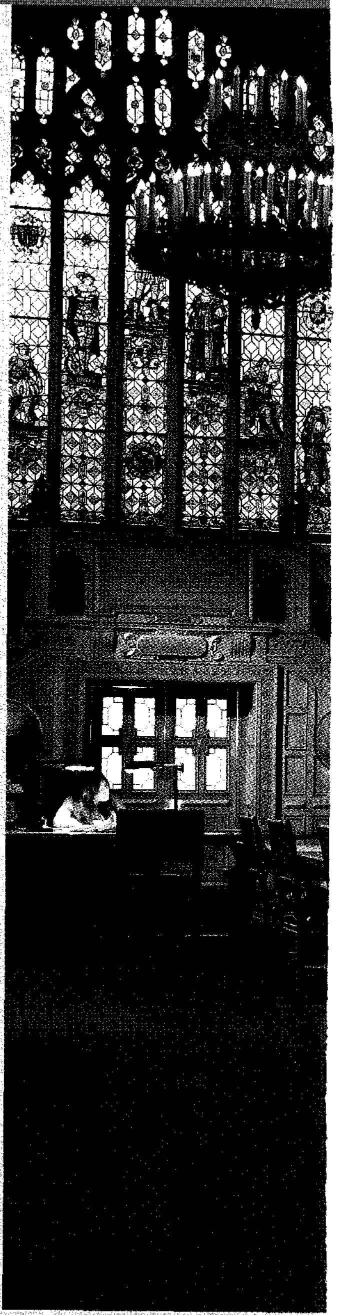

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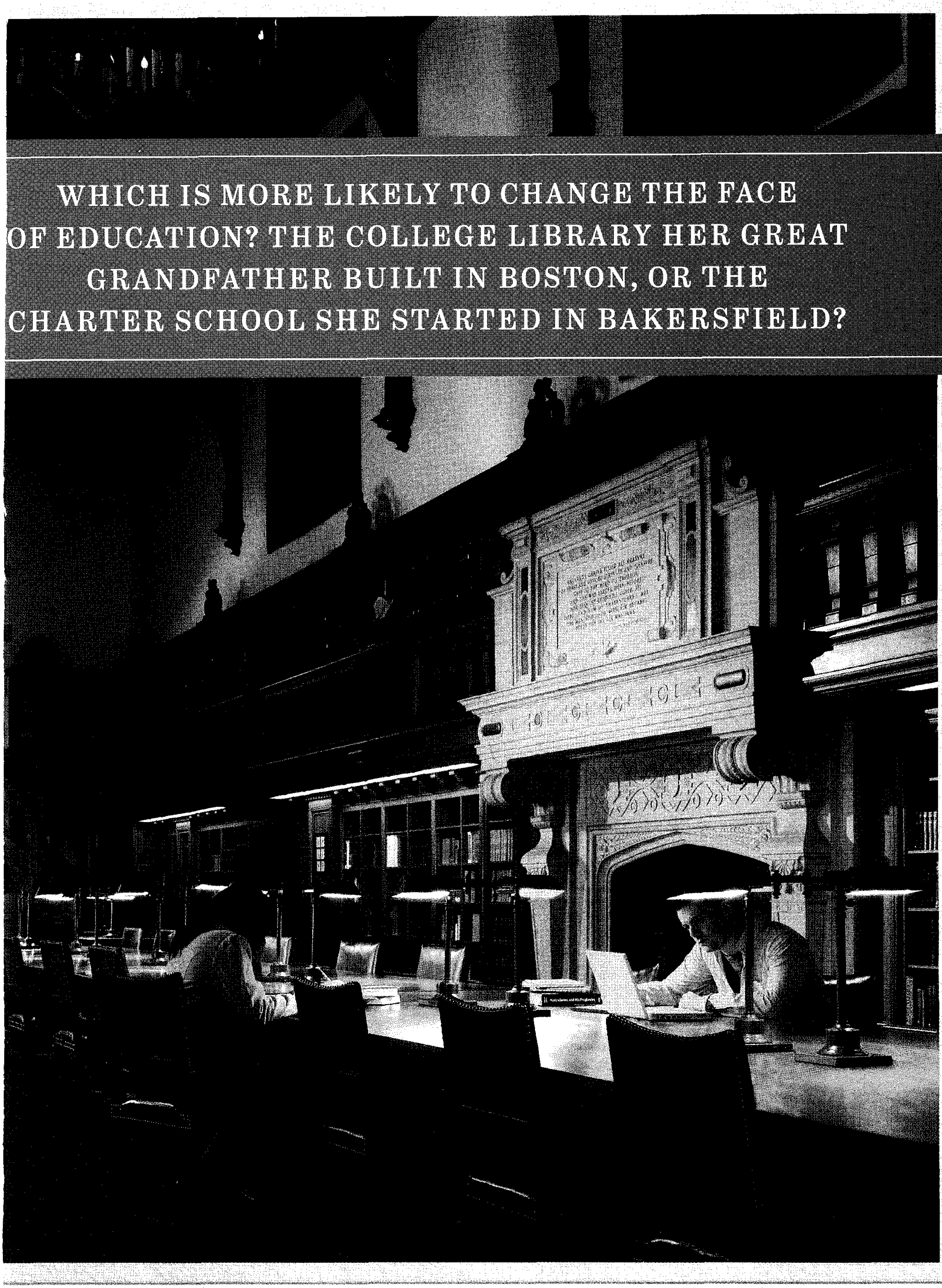


WHICH IS MORE LIKELY TO CHANGE THE FACE OF EDUCATION? THE COLLEGE LIBRARY HER GREAT GRANDFATHER BUILT IN BOSTON, OR THE CHARTER SCHOOL SHE STARTED IN BAKERSFIELD?

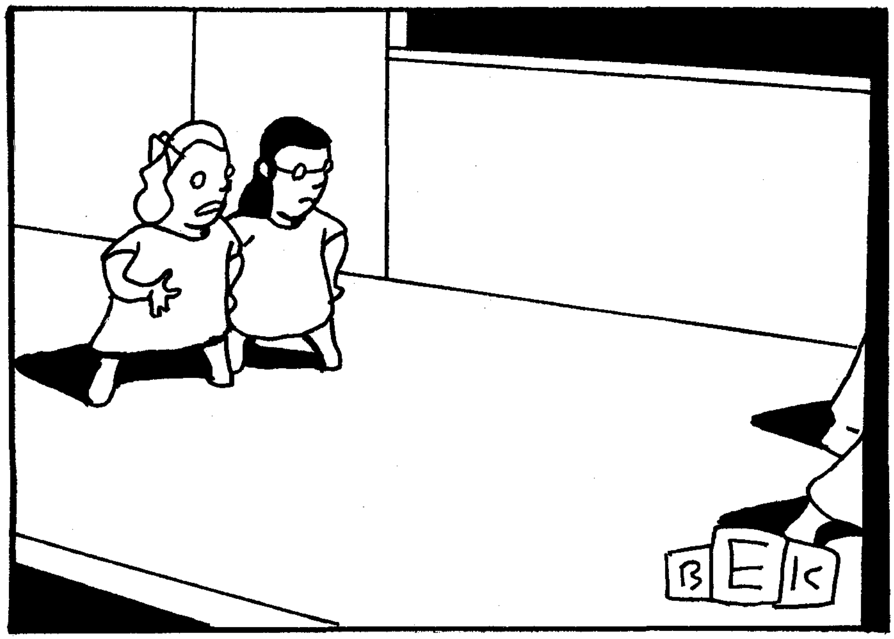
me. "We've created a petri dish in our factory farms for the evolution of dangerous pathogens."

Ten years ago, the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, in Washington, D.C., assessed the economic impact of resistant microbes in the United States at up to five billion dollars, and experts now believe the figure to be much higher. In July, 2004, the Infectious Diseases Society of America released a white paper, "Bad Bugs, No Drugs: As Antibiotic Discovery Stagnates . . . A Public Health Crisis Brews," citing 2002 C.D.C. data showing that, of that year's estimated ninety thousand deaths annually in U.S. hospitals owing to bacterial infection, more than seventy per cent had been caused by organisms that were resistant to at least one of the drugs commonly used to treat them. Drawing on these data, collected mostly from hospitals in large urban areas which are affiliated with medical schools, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found more than a hundred thousand cases of gram-negative antibiotic-resistant bacteria. No precise numbers for all infections, including those outside hospitals, have been calculated, but the C.D.C. also reported that, among gram-negative hospital-acquired infections, about twenty per cent were resistant to state-of-the-art drugs.

In April, I visited Dr. Stuart Levy, at Tufts University School of Medicine. Levy is a researcher-physician who has made key discoveries about how bacteria become resistant to antibiotics. In addition to the natural cell envelope of *Klebsiella*, Levy outlined three primary changes in bacteria that make them resistant to antibiotics. Each change involves either a mutation in the bacterium's own DNA or the importation of mutated DNA from another. (Bacteria can exchange DNA in the form of plasmids, molecules that are shared by the microbes and allow them to survive inhibitory antibiotics.) First, the bacteria may acquire an enzyme that can either act like a pair of scissors, cutting the drug into an inactive form, or modify the drug's chemical structure, so that it is rendered impotent. Thirty years ago, Levy discovered a second change: pumps inside the bacteria that could spit out the antibiotic once it had passed through the cell wall. His first reports were met with profound skepticism, but now, Levy told me, "most people would say that efflux is the most common form of bacterial resistance to antibiotics." The third change involves mutations that alter the inner contents of the microbe, so that the antibiotic can no longer inactivate its target.

Global studies have shown how quickly these bacteria can develop and spread. "This has been a problem in Mediterranean Europe that started about ten years ago," Dr. Christian Giske told me. Giske is a clinical microbiologist at Karolinska University Hospital, in Stockholm, who, with researchers in Israel and Denmark, recently reported on the worldwide spread of resistant gram-negative bacteria. He continued, "It started to get really serious during the last five or six years and has become really dramatic in Greece." A decade ago, only a few microbes in Southern Europe had multidrug resistance; now some fifty to sixty per cent of hospital-acquired infections are resistant.

Giske and his colleagues found that infection with a resistant strain of *Pseudomonas* increased, twofold to fivefold, a patient's risk of dying, and increased about twofold the patient's hospital stay. Like other experts in the field, Giske's team was concerned about the lack of new antibiotics being developed to combat gram-negative bacteria. "There are now a growing number of reports of cases of infections caused by gram-negative organisms for which no adequate therapeutic options exist," Giske and his colleagues wrote. "This return to the preantibiotic era has become a reality in many parts of the world."



"I internalize my mother's needs Monday through Friday and my father's needs most weekends."

Doctors and researchers fear that these bacteria may become entrenched in hospitals, threatening any patient who has significant health issues. "Anytime you hear about some kid getting snatched, you want to find something in that story that will convince you that that family is different from yours," Dr. Louis Rice, an expert in antibiotic resistance at Louis Stokes Cleveland VA Medical Center, told me. "But the problem is that any of us could be an I.C.U. patient tomorrow. It's not easy to convey this to people if it's not immediately a threat. You don't want to think about it. But it's actually anybody who goes into a hospital. This is scary stuff." Rice mentioned that he had a mild sinusitis and was hoping it would not need to be treated, because taking an antibiotic could change the balance of microbes in his body and make it easier for him to contract a pathogenic organism while doing his rounds at the hospital.

Genetic elements in the bacteria that promote resistance may also move into other, more easily contracted bugs. Moellering pointed out that, while *Klebsiella* seems best adapted to hospital settings, and poses the greatest risk to patients, other gram-negative bacteria—specifically *E. coli*, which is a frequent cause of urinary-tract infection in otherwise healthy people—have recently picked up the genes from *Klebsiella* which promote resistance to antibiotics.

In the past, large pharmaceutical companies were the primary sources of antibiotic research. But many of these companies have abandoned the field. "Eli Lilly and Company developed the first cephalosporins," Moellering told me, referring to familiar drugs like Keflex. "They developed a huge number of important antimicrobial agents. They had incredible chemistry and incredible research facilities, and, unfortunately, they have completely pulled out of it now. After Squibb merged with Bristol-Myers, they closed their antibacterial program," he said, as did Abbott, which developed key agents in the past treatment of gram-negative bacteria. A recent assessment of progress in the field, from U.C.L.A., concluded, "FDA approval of new antibacterial agents decreased by 56 per cent over the past 20 years (1998-2002 vs. 1983-1987)," noting that, in the researchers' projection of future development only six of the five hundred and six drugs currently being developed were new antibacterial agents. Drug companies are looking for blockbuster therapies that must be taken daily for decades, drugs like Lipitor, for high cholesterol, or Zyprexa, for psychiatric disorders, used by millions of people and generating many billions of dollars each year. Antibiotics are used to treat infections, and are therefore prescribed only for days or weeks. (The exception is the use of antibiotics in livestock, which is both a profit-driver and a potential cause of antibiotic resistance.)

"Antibiotics are the only class of drugs where all the experts, as soon as you introduce them clinically, we go out and tell everyone to try to hold it in reserve," Rice pointed out. "If there is a new cardiology drug, every cardiologist out there is saying that everyone deserves to be on it." In February, Rice wrote an editorial in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases* criticizing the lack of support from the National Institutes of Health; without this support, he wrote, "the big picture did not receive the attention it deserved." Rice acknowledges that there are competing agendas. "As loud as my voice might be, there are louder

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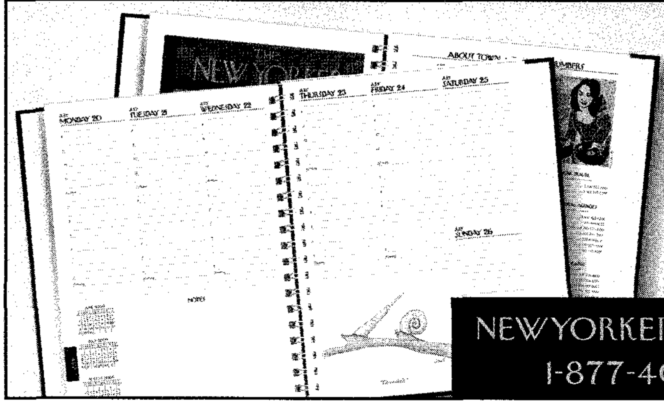

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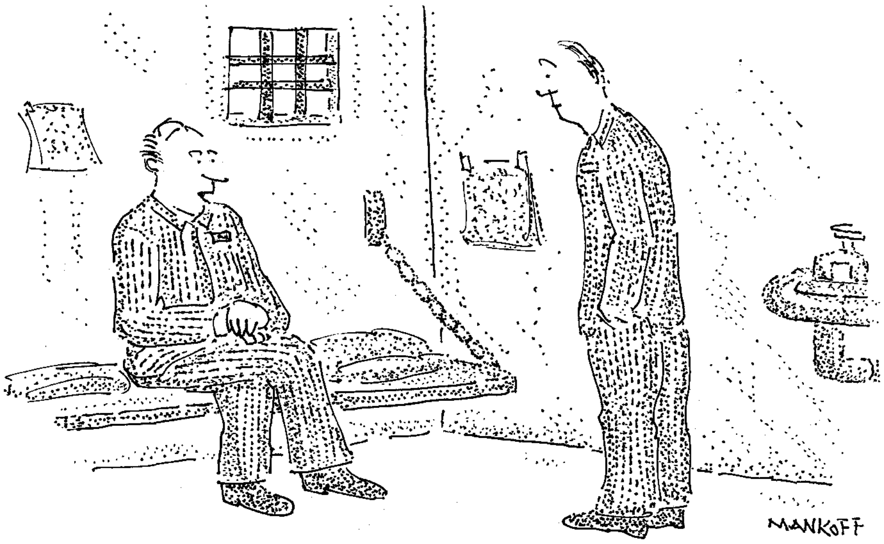

"I think I'm just going to sit this recession out."

voices screaming ‘AIDS,’” he told me. “And there are congressmen screaming ‘bioterrorism.’ ” Rice came up with the acronym ESKAPE bacteria—*Enterococcus faecium, Staphylococcus aureus, Klebsiella pneumoniae, Acinetobacter baumanni, Pseudomonas aeruginosa,* and the *Enterobacter* species—as a way of communicating the threat these microbes pose, and the Infectious Diseases Society is lobbying Congress to pass the Strategies to Address Antimicrobial Resistance Act, which would earmark funding for research on ESKAPE microbes and also set up clinical trials on how to limit infection and antibiotic resistance. Rice has also proposed studies to determine the most effective use—at what dosage, and for how long—of antibiotics for common infections like bronchitis and sinusitis.

Dr. Anthony Fauci is the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, which chairs the federal interagency working group on microbial resistance. Fauci told me that the government is acutely aware of the severity of the problem. He pointed out that the N.I.H. recently issued a call for proposals to study optimal use of antibiotics for common bacterial infections. It has also funded so-called “coöperative agreements,” including one on *Klebsiella,* to facilitate public-private partnerships where the basic research from the institute or from university laboratories can be combined with development by a pharmaceutical or a biotech company. Even so, the total funding for studying the resistance of ESKAPE microbes is about thirty-five million dollars, a fraction of the two hundred million dollars provided by the NIAID for research on antimicrobial resistance, most of which goes to malaria, t.b., and H.I.V. “The difficulty that we are faced with is that our budget has been flat for the last five years,” Fauci told me. “In real dollars, we’ve lost almost fifteen per cent purchasing power,” because of an inflation index of about three per cent for biomedical research and development.

Since September 11, 2001, significant funding has been directed toward the study of anthrax and other microbes, like the one that causes plague, which could be used as bioweapons. Although there is little concern that *Klebsiella* or *Acinetobacter* might be weaponized, the basic science of their mutation and resistance could be useful in helping us to understand these threats. Fauci hopes to make the case that funds for biodefense should be used to study the ESKAPE bugs, but, for now, he is quick to point out the challenge posed by a lack of resources. “The problem is, it is extremely difficult to do a prospective controlled trial, because when people come into the hospital they immediately get started on some treatment, which ruins the period of study,” he said, referring to research into the treatment of common infections. “The culture of American medicine makes a study like that more difficult to execute.”

These types of studies—on how often, and for how long, antibiotics should be prescribed—are much easier to conduct in countries where medicine is largely socialized and prescriptions are tightly regulated. Recently, researchers in Israel, where most citizens receive their care through such a system, showed that refraining from empirically prescribing antibiotics during the summer months resulted in a sharp decline in ear infections caused by antibiotic-resistant microbes. (In the United States, a 1998 study estimated that fifty-five per cent of all antibiotics prescribed for respiratory infections in outpatients—22.6 million prescriptions—were unnecessary.) In Sweden, the government closely monitors all infections, and has the power to intervene as needed. “Our infection-control people have a lot of authority,” Giske said. “This is power from the legislation.” Once a resistant microbe is identified, stringent protocols are put in place, with dramatic results. Fewer than two per cent of the *staphylococci* in Sweden are MRSA, compared with sixty per cent in the United States. “Of course, it’s only around ten million people, so it’s possible to intervene because everything is smaller,” Giske said, adding, “Maybe Swedes are more used to this type of intervention and regulation.”

Stuart Levy’s laboratory occupies the eighth floor of a renovated building on Harrison Avenue in Boston’s Chinatown, across the street from Tufts Medical Center. As I passed from his office into the corridor, I detected the acrid smell of agar, which is used to grow bacteria. That day, a laboratory technician was testing specimens taken from the eyes of people with bacterial conjunctivitis who had been given an antibiotic eye drop containing fluoroquinolone. Levy was comparing the bacteria from the infected eyes with those in the noses, cheeks, and throats of the same patients. His technician held up a petri dish with a cranberry-colored agar base. The patient’s specimen was growing bacteria that were susceptible to the antibiotic; the drug had created a large oval clear zone on the plate which resembled the halo around the moon. The study investigates whether an antibiotic applied to the eye would affect bacteria in the nose and mouth as well, which might indicate that what seems to be an innocuous and limited treatment may profoundly change a wider area of the body and foster resistant microbes.

Levy has also received funding from the N.I.H. to study *Yersinia pestis*, the microbe that causes plague; the Department of Agriculture has sponsored his study of *Pseudomonas fluorescens*, a soil-based bacterium that has the potential to protect plants from microbial infection. He plans to develop it as a biocontrol agent, so that farmers can be weaned off the potent antibiotics and chemicals they use to treat their fields. "We need to treat biology with biology, not chemistry," he said. In other studies, Levy and his team are looking at ways to render bacteria nondestructive and noninvasive, so that they might enter the body without harmful effects. This makes it necessary to identify virulence factors—which parts of the bacteria cause damage to our tissues. Levy's laboratory is targeting a protein in gram-negative organisms called MAR, which appears to act as a master switch, turning on both virulence genes and genes that mediate resistance, like the efflux pump. In collaboration with a startup company called Paratek, of which Levy is a co-founder, his laboratory is screening novel compounds in the hope of finding a drug that blocks MAR.

Frederick Ausubel, a bacterial geneticist at the Massachusetts General Hospital, in Boston, is searching for drugs to combat bacterial virulence, using tiny animals like worms, which have intestinal cells that are similar to those in humans, and which are susceptible to lethal microbial infection. The worm that Ausubel is studying, *Caenorhabditis elegans*, is one and a half millimetres in length. "You are probably going to have to screen millions of compounds and you can't screen millions of infected mice," Ausubel said. "So our approach was to find an alternative host that could be infected with human pathogens which was small enough and cheap enough to be used in drug screens. What's remarkable is that many common human pathogens, including *Staphylococcus* and *Pseudomonas*, will cause intestinal infection and kill the worms. So now you can look for a compound that cures it, that prevents the pathogen from killing the host." Ausubel first screened some six thousand compounds by hand and found eight, none of them traditional antibiotics, that may protect the worms. He is also attempting, among other potential solutions, to find a compound that would block what is called "quorum sensing," in which bacteria release small molecules to communicate with one another and signal when a critical mass is present. Once this quorum is reached, the bacteria turn on their virulence genes. "Bacteria don't want to alert their host that they are there by immediately producing virulence factors which the host would recognize," triggering the immune system, Ausubel explained. "When they reach a certain quorum, there are too many of them for the host to do anything about it." Bonnie Bassler, a molecular biologist at Princeton University, has recently shown that it is through quorum sensing that cholera bacteria are able to accumulate in the intestines and release toxins that can be fatal; *Pseudomonas* is also known to switch on its virulence genes in response to signals from quorum sensing.

Moellering is enthusiastic but cautious about this avenue of research. "It's a great idea, but so far nobody has been able to make it work for human infections," he told me. With certain types of *staphylococci*, Moellering said, "mutations have occurred spontaneously in nature that cut down on a number of virulence factors . . . but they still cause serious infections. I'm not sure that we have a way yet to use what we know about virulence factors to develop effective antimicrobial agents. And we almost certainly will have to use these agents in combination with antibiotics." No one, Moellering said, has developed a way to disarm bacteria sufficiently to allow the human body to naturally and consistently defend against them. I asked him what we should do to combat these new superbugs. "Nobody has the answer right now," he said. "The fact of the matter is that we have found all the easy targets" for drug development. He went on, "So the only other thing we can do is continue to work on antibiotic stewardship." Meanwhile, new resistant bacteria, Moellering asserted, aren't going to go away. "We can temper things, we might be able to slow the rate of emergence of resistance, but it's unlikely that we will ever be able to conquer it." ♦

From the Keene (N.H.) Daily Sentinel.

Gregory Pregent shows off some of the many antiques he will auction off from the Masonic Temple tonight along with his father, Dale.

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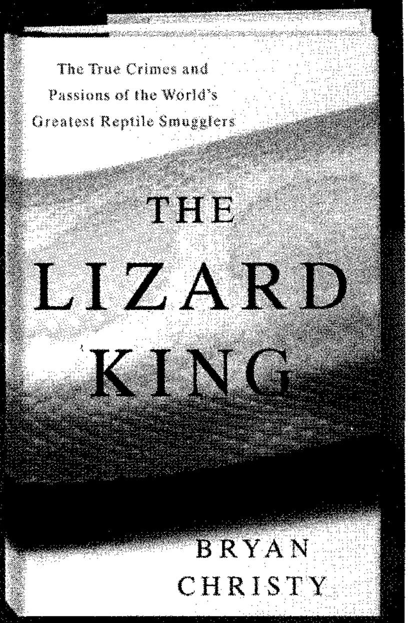

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THE SPORTING SCENE

RUNNING TO BEIJING

The making of a long-distance runner.

BY PETER HESSLER

In the Grizzly Manor Café, a man with a broken right hand sat alone eating eggs. He had tired eyes and graying hair and a nose that looked deflated. The town of Big Bear Lake is small—fewer than seven thousand people—and athletes stand out. It didn't take long for a woman to ask, "Are you with Rampage?"

The man had been eating awkwardly with his left hand. He said yes, he was in town with Quinton Jackson, better known as Rampage, the current light-heavyweight titleholder of the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

"I knew I saw you on TV! Are you training him?"

"Yeah, he's up here now."

The woman said that the challenger, Forrest Griffin, didn't stand a chance in their upcoming fight.

"We all like Forrest, but he's not ready for Rampage," the trainer agreed. "This is the most relaxed camp we've had, because nobody thinks he's going to beat Rampage."

"I saw Rampage in Kmart," the woman said. She was heavyset and her tank top showed off her tattoos. Other diners picked up on the conversation, and somebody mentioned the boxer Tito Ortiz, who owned a house in town.

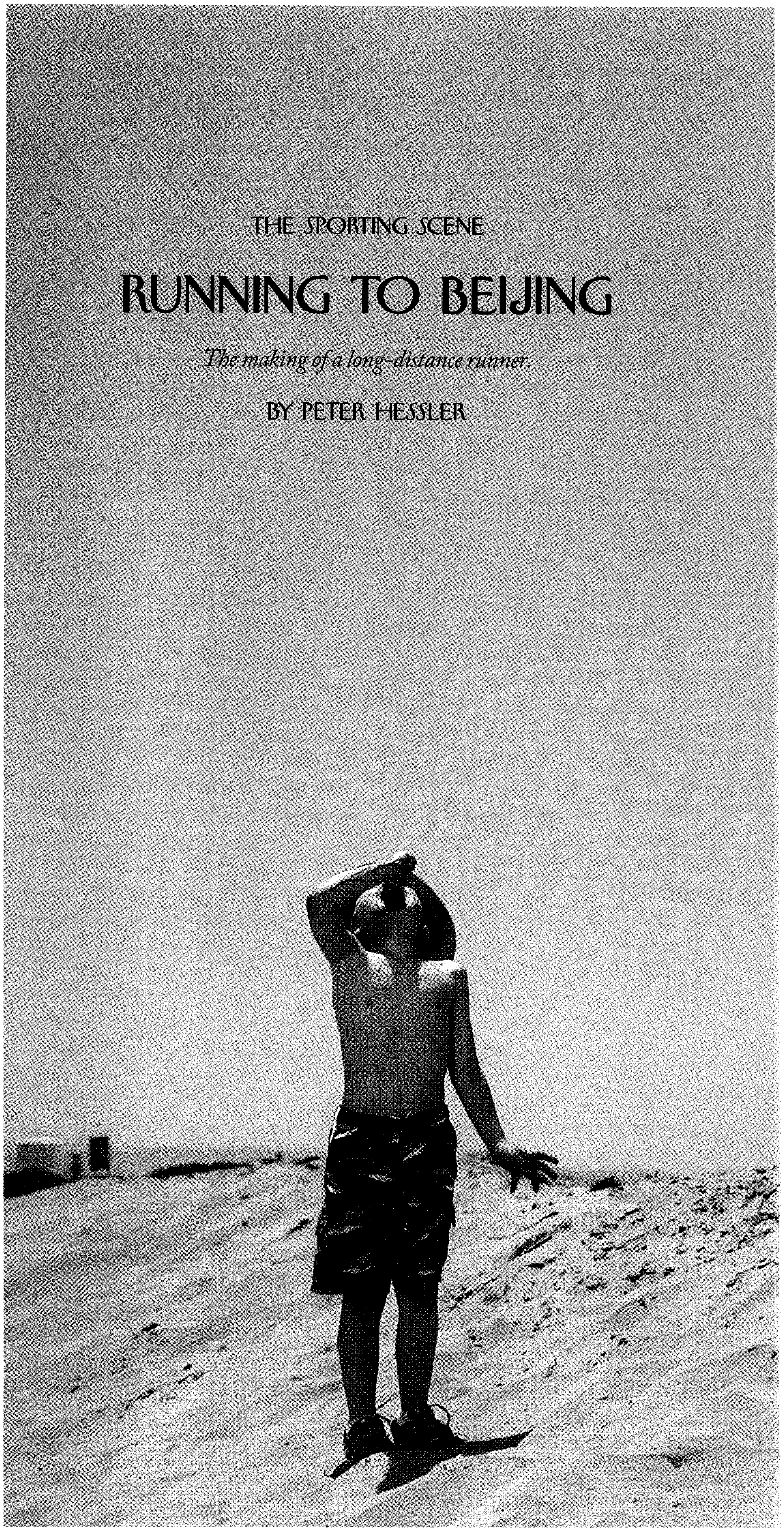
"He's made more money coaching than he did fighting. That's when you step out of it."

"Nobody beats the clock."

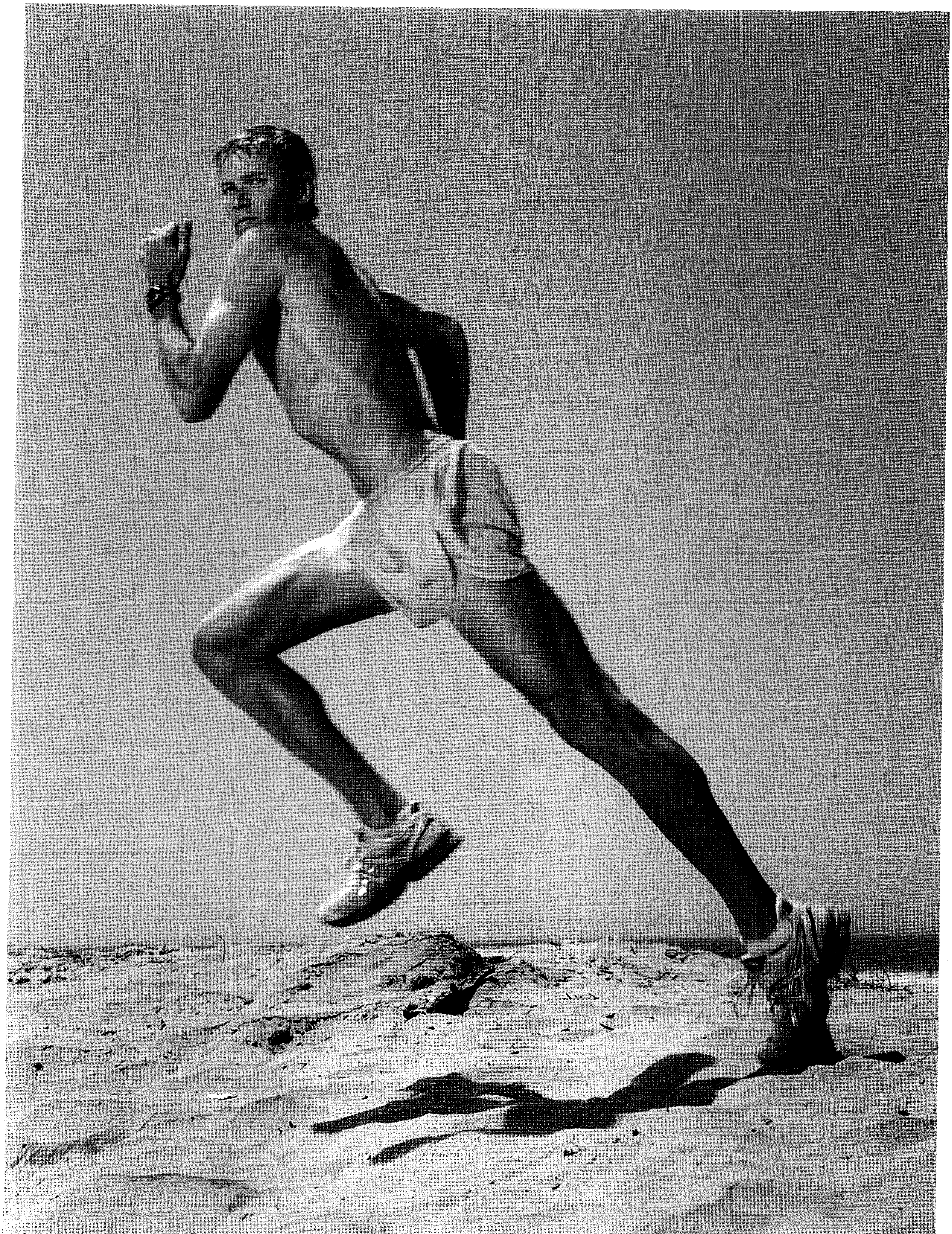
"Nobody."

Big Bear Lake sits at an altitude of seven thousand feet, in the San Bernardino Mountains of Southern California. In the winter, it's a ski town; in the summer people come to escape the crowds of Los Angeles and San Diego. For athletes, late spring is a good time to open a training camp, and during the first week in June I'd driven up from the coast to see Ryan Hall. At the age of twenty-five, Hall has already run the fastest marathon ever by an American-born athlete, and he's expected to contend for a medal in this summer's Olympics. Hall grew up in Big Bear Lake, and just the weekend before he had returned to begin preparing for the Games. Given the heat and pollution of Beijing, this year's marathon could be one of the toughest races in Olympic history.

In the café, I listened to the conversation for a while and then I introduced myself to the trainer. His name was Chris Reilly, and he specialized in Thai



Despite the running boom, America lagged in élite distance events for years. But Ryan Hall



won the Olympic Trials marathon last year, dominating the strongest field in Trials history. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

boxing; he'd broken his hand while sparring. "Oh, I've seen the signs around town," he said, when I mentioned Ryan Hall. Across the street hung a thirty-one-foot-tall banner with a photograph of Hall winning last November's Olympic Trials Marathon, in New York. "We're here for the same reason," the trainer continued. "Mainly it's the altitude. You're getting half the oxygen. And it's also getting away from the distractions in L.A."

When we finished talking, Reilly gave me a left-handed shake. "Tell Ryan I said good luck in Beijing," he said.

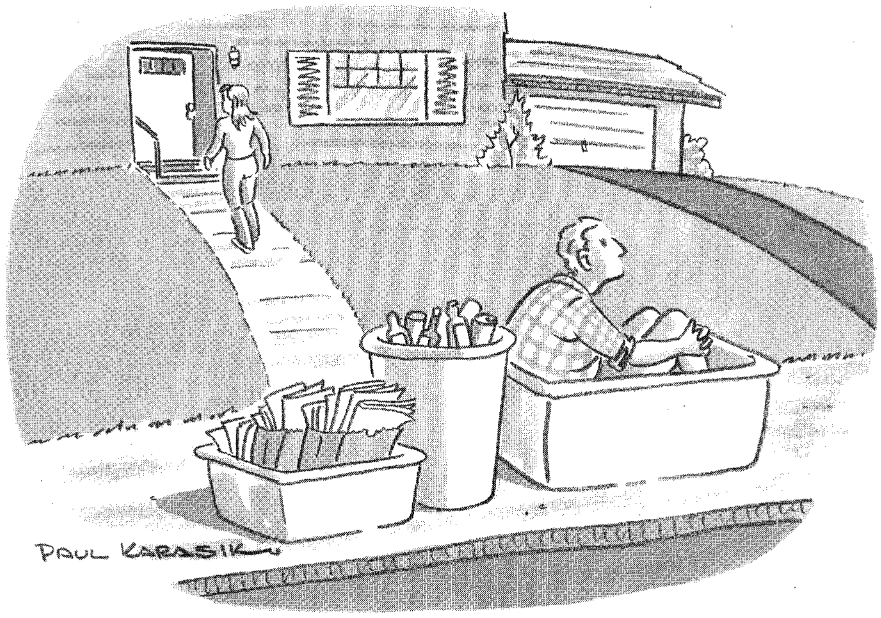
It seemed appropriate to send best wishes to Rampage, so I did. Later, I saw one of the cooks outside the café, on a cigarette break.

"Everybody here knows Ryan Hall," the cook said. He took a puff and grinned. "Run, Ryan, run!"

Ryan Hall stands five feet eleven inches tall, and he weighs a hundred and forty pounds, and in most parts of the country he wouldn't be recognized as an athlete. He has slender shoulders, slight arms, and narrow hips. Sleepy eyes—this is the look of a man who runs so much that he takes a nap most days. His hair is sun-bleached blond and shaggy; his mother still serves as his barber. When he walks somewhere, he takes his time, and he has the California habit of speaking slowly and letting his words hang in the air. Some distance runners have a nervous, sparrowlike quality—this seems particularly common among milers. But Ryan Hall's intensity is beneath the surface, like a lizard lying in the sun. He can move when he has to, but until that time comes he can wait.

As a boy, he admired the boxers around town. Oscar de la Hoya kept a house in Big Bear Lake, and Sugar Shane Mosley trained there as well. Once, when Hall was working part time at the local movie theatre, he sold some licorice to Sugar Shane. Hall told me that the marathon reminds him of boxing, at least in the preparation. A marathoner becomes accustomed to isolation, and during a training cycle there are no tune-up events, no preliminary races. Afterward it takes weeks to recover. Patience is key, and so is faith. "I love the boxer mentality," Hall said. "You go Rocky style, you train for months, and then you've got two hours where it's all on the line. I feel like I have that same mentality." He went on, "Growing up in the mountains, and being in the middle of five kids, and living off a teacher's salary—we weren't poor, but it was the simple things that we did. We'd go out and cut wood or do something like that."

The Hall family is deeply religious, and they had originally come to Big Bear Lake as an act of faith. Ryan was born in Seattle, where his father, Mickey, taught in a Christian private school. Partly to get some exercise, and partly to save money, Mickey often ran home from his job. One day, in the middle of a run, he had a sudden urge to stop and pray.



"I prayed, and I felt like the Lord wanted me to get back into a public-school system," Mickey recalled recently. "I went home and told my wife, and told her to think about it, to pray on it. And after a couple of weeks she said, 'I don't want to move, but I think you're right—I think we're supposed to.'"

Mickey quit his job and moved the family to Los Angeles. For ten months he worked in construction, and finally he was offered a position teaching special education at Big Bear High School. The Hall family moved again, and Mickey found an empty lot and built a house himself. He had always been skilled with his hands, and he was athletic. At Pepperdine University, he'd played varsity baseball, and had been drafted by the Baltimore Orioles, although he didn't sign. In Big Bear Lake, he started training for triathlons as a hobby. In addition to teaching special ed, he coached baseball and volleyball, and all the Hall kids were good athletes. But Ryan, who was the third child, had a different idea about sports.

"One year in middle school, I got this vision that I wanted to run," Ryan told me. "I think it came from God. I was on my way to a basketball game—it was just this crazy idea that comes into your head, and the desire to act on it. The next weekend, my dad and I ran around the lake, fifteen miles. After that, I decided to start training."

The high school didn't have a track or a running program. But Mickey volunteered to coach, and he studied training guides about the sport. In the beginning he had only one athlete, Ryan. As a tenth grader, Hall ran the sixteen hundred metres (a distance that's close to the mile) in four minutes and twenty-two seconds. Hall had a natural stride, and he also had the obsession that characterizes top runners. He posted photographs of world-class milers in his bedroom, and he listened to the Olympic anthem repeatedly. On Halloween, when he was fifteen years old, he carved out a jack-o'-lantern with the five rings and "2008," because that was the year he planned to run in the Games. Before eleventh grade he got a notion about the numbers 4:05. He inscribed "4:05" into wet cement outside the house, and he wrote "4:05" all over his school notebooks. When it snowed, he scratched "4:05" onto the window of the family car. The following spring, in 2000, he ran the sixteen hundred metres in exactly four minutes and five seconds.

By that year it seemed likely that some American schoolboy was going to break the four-minute mile. Two other juniors were also close: in Virginia, Alan Webb ran 4:03, and a Michigan boy named Dathan Ritzenhein clocked 4:05 in the sixteen hundred metres. The last time a high-school student had broken the barrier was in 1967, and many prep records from that decade still stood. This was a mystery of the running boom: the movement had produced few élite athletes, despite the fact that initially it had been inspired by Frank Shorter's victory in the marathon at the Munich Olympics of 1972. Apart from Shorter, no American man had won a medal in distance events since 1968. In 2000, the nation's marathoners were so weak that they couldn't even send a full team to Sydney. At both the men's and women's Olympic trials, the top American marathoners didn't make the Olympic time standard, which limited each team to one athlete.

For serious fans of the sport, the American performance in Sydney was less interesting than what was going on in the nation's high schools. As Hall, Webb, and Ritzenhein each won their respective state cross-country championships, people began to talk of a resurgence in competitive running led by "the Big Three." In December, 2000, they finally met in the five thousand metres at the Foot Locker Cross Country Championship in Orlando. Ritzenhein, who excelled at cross-country, finished first, followed by Webb and then Hall. The next month, Webb ran a mile in under four minutes, and later that spring he broke the high-school record set by Jim Ryun, which had stood for thirty-seven years. In April, Webb and Hall faced off for a mile race in Arcadia, California. Webb won easily, and Hall was so upset that after the finish he took off his singlet and spikes, threw them onto the track, and ran hard three miles through town, barefoot and shirtless. By the time he returned, somebody had stolen his uniform.

Hall had always been intensely competitive, and in the spring of 2001 he began to suffer nosebleeds before races, probably from stress. He accepted a running scholarship to Stanford, but for much of his time there he struggled. After years of solitary training, it was hard to adjust to being on a team. "We'd go for a run, and Ryan would just hit it hard," Ian Dobson, a former Stanford teammate, told me. "He would just hammer everybody. It seemed like he wanted to beat everybody, and it created a lot of animosity." Dobson said that Hall's Christianity was initially another source of tension. "Stanford's a whole different world. Most of us weren't religious. I'm not religious at all, and I felt threatened. What's this guy going to do? Is he going to try to convert me? Is he judging me?" Dobson said. "It was partly my problem, of course," he added. "He's one of the few Christians I know who aren't judgmental."

Over time, Dobson and Hall became close friends, and in 2003 they led Stanford to a national championship in cross-country. Hall also met his future wife, Sara Bei, at the university, where she was one of the top women runners. But being part of a college team never felt completely natural to Hall. He told me that competitiveness was the quality he disliked most in himself. "I just have a hard time seeing Christ being competitive," he said. "I think it's my immaturity that prevents me from working out with other people. I just don't like how it feels in my heart, to be honest. I hate how I feel inside."

After college, he turned professional, and he initially didn't perform well in the five thousand metres at high-level track races in Europe. But in 2007, in Houston, he entered his first half-marathon and broke the American record by more than a minute. Three months later, at the Flora London Marathon, he surprised the best runners in the world by taking the lead late in the race. He faded to seventh, but finished in 2:08:24, the fastest début marathon ever by an American runner. Since then, he has run two more excellent marathons, proving that he's already among the best in the world.

His coach, Terrence Mahon, told me that with any great athlete it's a matter of matching physical and mental gifts, and sometimes the environment plays a role. The marathon allows Hall to race less often, and the solitary training brings him back to the mountains, where he channels his competitiveness. "He grew up in a small town where he didn't have any competition," Mahon explained. "He lived on top of a mountain. They didn't have a track program until his dad started it for him. That's the habit—he never understood what it was to share the pace. For his survival, he had to be internally motivated."

Before 1972, when Frank Shorter won the marathon at Munich, long-distance running was a fringe sport in the United States, and élite athletes were often loners who had been surprised to discover their natural talent. Billy Mills, an orphan who grew up on a Lakota Indian reservation in South Dakota, originally tried to become a boxer but realized that he was better at running. In 1964, at the Tokyo Olympics, Mills won the gold medal in the ten thousand metres. One of his peers, a skinny misfit from Spokane, Washington, named Gerry Lindgren, trained on the verge of insanity—he ran between twenty-five and thirty-five miles every day—and, in 1964, while still in high school, he beat the top Soviet athletes. (Lindgren later abandoned his wife and children, quit racing at the élite level, and absconded to Hawaii.) Other runners, like Jim Ryun and Frank Shorter, were fortunate to encounter gifted coaches early in their careers. But they had few resources at their disposal, especially for the marathon. Shoes were so bad that Shorter had a pair of track spikes customized with flat soles for the race in Munich. (He got blisters within the first six miles.) Along with some other runners, he arranged to have U.S.A. printed on his own uniform, because the standard team issue was made of heavy material that was terrible for an endurance athlete. During the race he drank flat Coca-Cola at every aid station. Olympic marathoners prepare their own bottles, but sports drinks were still in the early stages of development, so Shorter shook up the Coke until it was de-fizzed.

Back then, it was rare for an American city to host a marathon. In 1971, my family moved to Columbia, Missouri, one of the few towns in the Midwest that sponsored a 26.2-mile race. A local boxing trainer had founded the Heart of America Marathon in 1960, as a way of forcing his fighters to get in shape. None of that trainer's athletes actually finished the inaugural race, but somehow the event survived, and a small community of diehards trained for it every year. My father became fascinated by the challenge, and as a professor of sociology he liked the weirdness. His training partners included Vietnam vets and religious fanatics and oddball academics; the only thing they had in common was a desire to run as fast as possible. They competed in local races, which tended to be poorly organized. Before the start, they'd give the stopwatch to whoever was expected to be the best runner. If he got passed, he handed over the watch to the new leader. They left a clipboard at the finish line, and it was the winner's responsibility to pick it up and record the times for everybody who followed.

TROUBLE

Marilyn Monroe took all her sleeping pills
to bed when she was thirty-six, and Marlon Brando's daughter
hung in the Tahitian bedroom
of her mother's house,
while Stanley Adams shot himself in the head. Sometimes
you can look at the clouds or the trees
and they look nothing like clouds or trees or the sky or the ground.
The performance artist Kathy Change
set herself on fire while Bing Crosby's sons shot themselves
out of the music industry forever.
I sometimes wonder about the inner lives of polar bears. The French
philosopher Gilles Deleuze jumped
from an apartment window into the world
and then out of it. Peg Entwistle, an actress with no lead
roles, leaped off the "H" in the HOLLYWOOD sign
when everything looked black and white
and David O. Selznick was king, circa 1932. Ernest Hemingway
put a shotgun to his head in Ketchum, Idaho
while his granddaughter, a model and actress, climbed the family tree
and overdosed on phenobarbital. My brother opened
thirteen fentanyl patches and stuck them on his body
until it wasn't his body anymore. I like
the way geese sound above the river. I like
the little soaps you find in hotel bathrooms because they're beautiful.

"Nobody knew what the heck we were doing," my father told me recently. "But after Shorter, that changed everything. It became a whole lot easier, with equipment and everything." Shorter came out with a line of specialty clothing, building on his experience of Olympic improvisation. Many of the early runners were tinkerers. Ron Hill, a British marathoner who finished sixth at Munich, was a textile chemist who experimented with mesh shirts and reflective materials. Bill Bowerman, the track coach at the University of Oregon, messed around with a waffle iron and created a new type of shoe sole. Soon, the company he co-founded, Nike, was selling models specifically designed for the marathon. Races became better organized, and publications like *Runner's World* taught people about élite training methods. In distance running, an athlete with some natural talent can improve quickly if he trains right, and by 1976 my father had come close to qualifying for the Olympic trials in the marathon.

Health had little to do with this initial wave of runners. "I didn't know anybody who did it for health," my father said. "You became intensely aware of your body, but it wasn't like, I want to live a long life. It was more like, What can I get out of this machine? It was very competitive."

For a marathoner, though, competitiveness tends to be directed inward. In training, the long buildup to a race may be similar to what a boxer goes through, but the focus is completely different. A boxer prepares for a specific opponent; a marathoner prepares to push his body to the limits of endurance. At the élite level, marathoners are well aware of their competition, and tactics are important; but everything begins and ends with individual fitness. The most crucial opponents are found within: the accumulation of lactic acid in muscles, the depletion of glycogen. A marathoner worries about hitting "the wall"—the moment at which glycogen stores are so low that an athlete can become disoriented.

During the seventies, runners became obsessed with learning about such physical limitations. In Dallas, a doctor named Kenneth H. Cooper conducted a test in which he put athletes on treadmills, connected tubes to their mouths, and ran them to the point of exhaustion. By collecting all the expelled air, Cooper calculated the volume of oxygen consumed, in relation to body weight. This figure, known as the VO_2 max, quantified cardiovascular fitness. Cooper tested élite athletes like Frank Shorter, and the results became well known in the running community. Even today, in the airport of Eugene, Oregon, a town famous for its track tradition, a small display notes that the Oregon native Steve Prefontaine had the highest VO_2 max ever recorded in Cooper's lab.

Periodically my father participated in such experiments. In those days, serious runners imitated whatever the élites were doing, even in the lab. One of my father's running buddies had a Ph.D. in cardiac physiology, and at the University of Missouri he and his colleagues conducted tests on top local runners. My father was an ideal subject: he ran a hundred miles a week, and he had an inquisitive streak. He also had an appetite for pain. They tested his VO_2 max, and they conducted lactic-acid experiments, which involved running him hard and then drawing large amounts of blood. They did a muscle-fibre test in which they extracted a chunk of my father's thigh. The moment they snipped the tissue, the muscle contracted so violently that the doctor had to stand on my father's leg in order to yank out the sample. "And then they said, 'You're ninety per cent slow-twitch muscle fibres,' " my father recalled. "Well, brilliant—so what?"

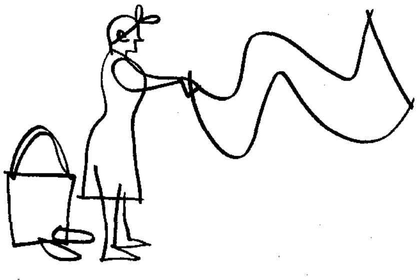
Sarah Kane hanged herself, Harold Pinter
brought her roses when she was still alive,
and Louis Lingg, the German anarchist, lit a cap of dynamite
in his own mouth
though it took six hours for him
to die, 1887. Ludwig II of Bavaria drowned
and so did Hart Crane, John Berryman, and Virginia Woolf. If you are
travelling, you should always bring a book to read, especially
on a train. Andrew Martinez, the nude activist, died
in prison, naked, a bag
around his head, while in 1815 the Polish aristocrat and writer
Jan Potocki shot himself with a silver bullet.
Sara Teasdale swallowed a bottle of blues
after drawing a hot bath,
in which dozens of Roman senators opened their veins beneath the water.
Larry Walters became famous
for flying in a Sears patio chair and forty-five helium-filled
weather balloons. He reached an altitude of 16,000 feet
and then he landed. He was a man who flew.
He shot himself in the heart. In the morning I get out of bed, I brush
my teeth, I wash my face, I get dressed in the clothes I like best.
I want to be good to myself.

—*Matthew Dickman*

One year, physiologists designed an experiment to test whether it was best for a marathoner to wear a mesh shirt, a solid shirt, or no shirt. In order to discover this elusive truth, they put my father and other runners on a treadmill for an hour at a fast pace, in a laboratory with a controlled temperature of ninety degrees Fahrenheit and ninety per cent humidity. They weighed each athlete before and after, to calculate lost sweat. They also tracked body temperature with a rectal thermometer. They didn't anticipate, however, that a human being running at a pace of ten and a half miles an hour naturally expels a rectal thermometer. Taping it in place didn't work. Finally, my father had to reach behind him and hold the thermometer while running at full speed. He did this a total of seven times, always for an hour, sometimes with a mesh shirt, sometimes with a solid shirt, sometimes with no shirt. Recently, I asked him why he had agreed to participate in such a study.

"I figured what the hell, I want to know what's better," he said. "I wanted to get my time down." The results indicated that a mesh shirt was best, followed by a solid shirt, then no shirt. ("It's like a radiator," my father explained.) Nowadays, at the age of sixty-six, my father runs ten miles a day, six times a week. He still has a scar on his thigh from the muscle-fibre test. He says that if a doctor told him that running would shorten his life he'd keep doing it.

One sunny morning in Big Bear Lake, Ryan Hall set off on a fast ten-miler. Typically, he did such a workout once a week, to increase speed; he complemented this with a weekly run of twenty or more miles that was designed to prepare him for the latter stages of a marathon. Today he started on the north shore of the lake, where steep mountains drop to rocky banks, and he followed Highway 38 back toward town. There was a slight tailwind; he flashed through the first mile in well under five minutes. Out on the lake, fifty yards from shore, a fisherman in a boat stood up and shouted, "Go, Ryan!"



Two of us accompanied Hall on bikes: his brother Steve took the lead, and I followed. At thirty, Steve is the oldest of the Hall siblings, and for the past few years he has worked construction in Big Bear Lake. Recently he quit his job in order to spend these pre-Olympic months as his younger brother's assistant. One of Steve's main tasks was to bike alongside Ryan on hard days, handing him energy drinks every fifteen minutes. That was preparation for the heat of Beijing—Hall was training his body to process more fluids than usual.

When he hit the second mile, Steve called out the time: "Four-fifty-nine!" Hall was still relaxed: I could see that from the muscles of his back. He was shirtless, and he wore sunglasses and headphones; he listened to Christian praise music on his iPod Shuffle. Later in the run, when he fought the hills on the far side of the lake, he switched to techno. His head was so steady that he could have been on wheels like the rest of us. No bobbing, no weaving—no wasted motion at all. He kept his hands low, and his arms swung on a straight line from front to back. That was, in part, a Moroccan touch: when Ryan was in high school, he and his father watched tapes of Hicham El Guerrouj, the greatest miler of his generation, and they changed Ryan's arm carriage accordingly. But nobody had ever had to tinker with Ryan Hall's legs. "All the things you try to teach in drills, Ryan already had them," Vin Lananna, his first coach at Stanford, told me. "When you say, 'This is what somebody should look like while running,' that's Ryan Hall." Mahon, his current coach, had a simpler assessment: "He looks like a white Kenyan."

For the past two years, the Flora London Marathon has been the most competitive race in the world, and spectators have been shocked to see Ryan Hall with the lead pack of African runners. His looks cause him to stand out, but when it comes to the qualities that actually matter he has a great deal in common with his competition. Top African marathoners tend to come from high-altitude parts of the continent, especially the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and the countries that run along the Rift Valley, including Kenya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea. But scientific studies have shown that there's no significant difference in the VO_2 max rates of élite Kenyan and European runners. Instead, the Africans' advantage seems to come from running efficiency, body-mass index, and leg shape. Some of this may be genetic, but mostly it's a matter of training. From the time they are children, the Kenyans run more miles, and they run them faster. Hall had also been putting in high miles since he was a teen-ager, and over time he had honed his natural runner's build—high waist, big muscular thighs, long whippet-thin calves. It's simple physics: the leg is a lever, and you want power at the top and lightness at the bottom, and then you can fly.

After three miles around the lake, Hall raced through the town of Fawnskin. It was a tiny place, shaded by Jeffrey pines, and beside the road the North Shore Trading Company had posted two banners that said, "Run Ryan Run!" A sandwich shop had another banner, and so did the local real-estate agent. At twelve miles an hour, the signs around Fawnskin Market seemed to blur:

BEER—WINE—BAIT
RUN RYAN RUN!

The banners were everywhere in Big Bear Lake. An organization called the Lighthouse Project had printed them up, as a way of supporting the home-town Olympian. They had also started a local fitness campaign in which people kept track of any distance they ran or walked or biked. They logged their workouts on a Web site, with the goal of contributing a million community miles to Ryan Hall's Olympic training. Even Camp Rampage had pitched in: so far, the Ultimate Fighter's team had donated eight hundred and fifty miles from its morning runs. The schoolchildren took it seriously—Ryan had videotaped a message in which he explained that their training would give him a unique advantage in Beijing. One day, I went for an easy run with Ryan and his brother, and we were stopped on the road by a first grader named Sheyne Elrod. The boy wore a red "Fire Safety" ribbon pinned to his T-shirt, and he had a "Run Ryan Run" baseball cap. He asked Hall to sign it.

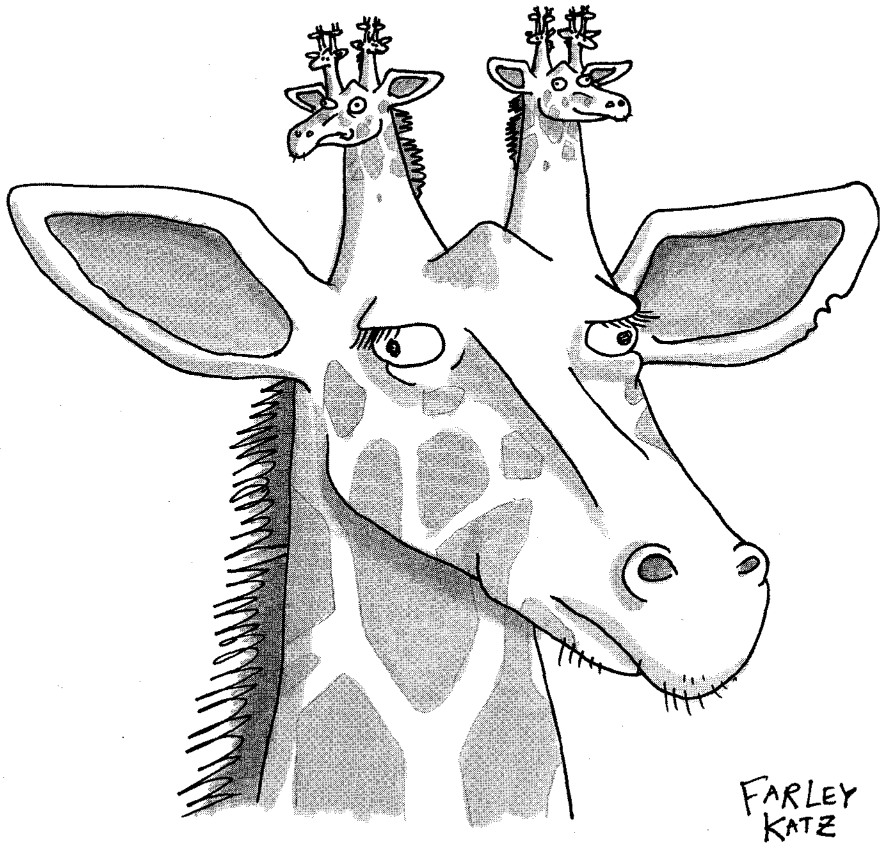
"How many miles have you run for me, Sheyne?" Hall asked.

"Fifteen," the boy said.

"That's great!"

Usually, Hall trained in Mammoth Lakes, another California mountain town, where his coach and other top American runners are based, composing a group called Team Running USA. But Hall had returned to his home town for this period because of the local support, and he also wanted to be closer to Chula Vista, the San Diego suburb where his wife, Sara, was training. Sara hoped to make the Olympic team in the fifteen hundred metres, and for such a short distance most athletes prepare at sea level. There's a tradeoff to high-altitude work: in thin air, blood becomes more efficient at carrying oxygen, but it's harder to run fast for long periods of time, which means that muscle efficiency suffers. "You need the rhythm of the track," Sara told me, when I visited her in Chula Vista. "And the altitude is harder on me. I have asthma, and I don't sleep well up there."

Even today, nobody is certain about the effectiveness of altitude training. There has never been a conclusive long-term study, because it's impossible to persuade élite athletes to alternate between years at sea level and years at altitude, all for the sake of science. The only published research has involved periods of a few months, which is too short a time to produce consistent results. But marathoners are particularly inclined to train at elevation, because they don't need track speed. In thin air, the liver and the kidneys respond by making more erythropoietin, a hormone that stimulates the production of red blood cells. "It's basically the same as taking EPO," Joe Vigil, an Olympic coach for the U.S. team, told me. He was referring to the injection of synthetic erythropoietin, which is the blood-doping method of choice among many endurance athletes. When somebody gets an injection of EPO, he essentially gains the benefits of high altitude without actually having to live in the mountains. Such injections are banned, and they're also risky: blood can become so thick that it stops the heart. Another sea-level option is to sleep in a sealed tent that circulates thin

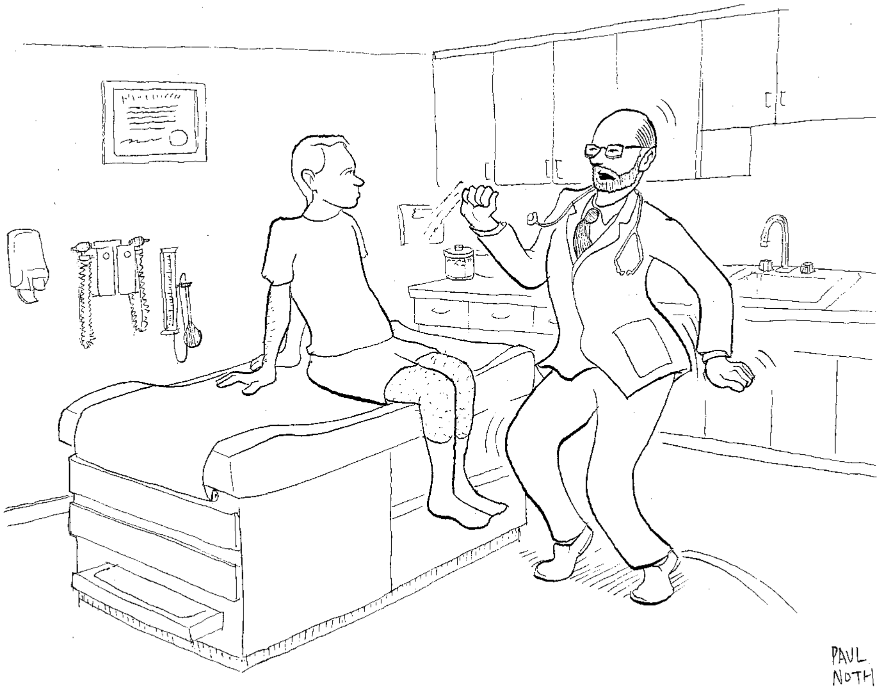


air. Even this is shadowy territory—Italy has banned altitude tents as an unfair advantage, and athletes can't use them in the Olympic Village. The World Anti-Doping Agency considered banning them but finally relented. "What are they going to do, ban altitude?" Hall told me.

He was a firm believer in mountain training, but it had drawbacks. In many ways, Ryan and Sara Hall are the ideal running couple—they even have similar all-American good looks, as Sara is also fair and long-limbed. She's religious, too; she first noticed Ryan at a high-school cross-country meet because he was signing his autographs with a Bible verse, the same way she did. But if both are preparing for important races, they can't breathe the same air—they have to be separated by seven thousand vertical feet. They try to see each other once a week, but they rarely spend more than two days together. "Living at altitude, you sacrifice a lot," Meb Keflezighi, another top American runner who trains with Team Running USA, told me. He met his wife, Yordanos Asgedom, in July of 2004, while he was preparing for the Athens Olympics. Keflezighi is an Eritrean émigré—he came to the United States at the age of twelve, eventually becoming a citizen. Asgedom shared this heritage, but she was living in the lowlands of Tampa, Florida.

"I invited her to come to Mammoth to visit," Keflezighi told me. "She said, 'Why don't you come to Tampa?' I said I couldn't do that—I needed to be at altitude. But when I asked her to come she said, 'No, the man has to come first.' She is a traditional woman."

In Athens, the men's marathon was held in the evening, and Keflezighi ran a nearly perfect race, winning the silver medal. Afterward, he didn't sleep, and at 4:50 A.M. he flew out of Greece, bound for Florida. "The flowers that I got from the medal ceremony were the flowers that I brought for our first date," he said. Four years later, the couple have two children, and they live happily in Mammoth Lakes, at seventy-eight hundred feet.

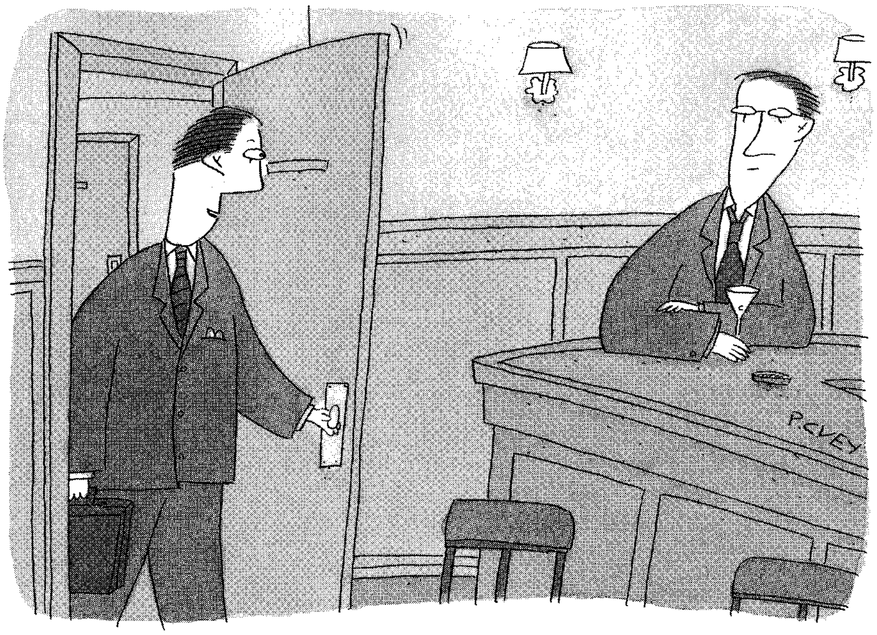


"Do you find it painful when I get funky?"

Keflezighi's silver was a breakthrough—the first time an American male marathoner had stood on the Olympic victory stand since Frank Shorter. Also in Athens, Deena Kastor, another Mammoth Lakes resident and member of Team Running USA, took the bronze in the women's race. Their performances suggested that, finally, after three decades, the nation was learning how to tap into its running boom.

Since 1972, there has been no shortage of American runners. In the old days, the sport attracted primarily oddballs and obsessives, but that changed steadily in the nineteen-seventies and eighties. Kenneth Cooper, the man behind the VO_2 max tests of élite athletes, coined the term "aerobics," and he published books that emphasized the benefits of exercising for health. People became more likely to run for rational reasons, and they trained accordingly; the hard-core competitiveness of my father's generation slipped away. Mileage dropped for high-school and college runners, because of fear of injury and burnout. These days, recreational runners tend to be educated people with good jobs. The average participant in the ING New York City Marathon has an annual household income of a hundred and thirty thousand dollars. The people who read *Runner's World* have a median income virtually the same as that of the readers of *Forbes*. When I talked to Cliff Bosley, the director of the Bolder Boulder, one of the largest road races in America, he said, "Running has demographics that are comparable to golf." Charity has become a major part of marathons, as runners claim limited entry spots by raising money for worthy causes. Mary Wittenberg, the president of the New York Road Runners, the nonprofit that organizes the city's marathon, told me that participants tend to be type-A overachievers who are attractive to advertisers. "Why are ING and the Bank of America involved?" she said, referring to the title sponsors of the races in New York and Chicago. "You want a customer that's in it for the long run, somebody who is going to look to retirement. That's a goal-oriented, driven person. It's all about the quest."

It's not, however, about the time. Today, most marathoners simply want to finish, and races have become dramatically slower, at least after the top runners. In 1982, the hundredth finisher in New York ran 2:25:45. Last year, in a race with nearly three times as many participants, the hundredth runner crossed the line at 2:39:26. It was also in 1982 that an American last won the New York marathon. Since then, the men's races have been dominated by African runners, who have gravitated toward the longer distance. For élite athletes, it's smart to focus on the



"Hey, I love what you've done with the office."

marathon, because races are wealthy enough to offer appearance fees and prize money in amounts that are extremely unusual at track events. In the United States, track has never drawn significant income from television, and neither has the marathon—but American marathons don't rely on TV money. Nor do they need to sell tickets to spectators. Instead, the participants raise the cash, because they can afford to pay high entry fees and their demographic appeals to advertisers. Marathoning may be the only sport in which sponsors target the losers, and the losers pay for the winners. That's how the running boom played out for the Kenyans and the Ethiopians: it created a lot of slow, rich American marathoners willing to pay big money to get beat.

For many years there was a sense that even the best American runners couldn't compete with the Africans. Recently, though, coaches have realized that athletes simply need to train harder. The "Big Three" high-school class of 2001—Ryan Hall, Alan Webb, and Dathan Ritzenhein—trained seriously at a young age, and all have become professionals capable of challenging the top runners in the world. In 2004, an Oregon boy named Galen Rupp finally broke the high-school record in the five thousand metres, set by Gerry Lindgren, in 1964. (Rupp made this year's Olympic team in the ten thousand metres.) Meanwhile, the big-city marathons have started using some of their wealth to support élite training groups. Each year, the ING New York City Marathon helps pay for the Team Running USA camp in Mammoth Lakes, which has already produced two Olympic medallists. In Oregon, Nike sponsors another top group. Shoe contracts have become a prime source of income for many track runners; athletes are valuable marketers for the hordes of affluent recreational runners.

When Ryan Hall won the Olympic Trials marathon in 2007, he dominated the strongest field in Trials history. Keflezighi, the defending silver medallist, finished eighth—during training he had struggled with injuries, but even in good health he would have had to run well to make the team. Dathan Ritzenhein took second, and he told me that top American talent is increasingly drawn to the marathon, partly because of the payouts. "If I was to say that the money doesn't mean anything to me, I'd be lying," he said. "But it's not about that at the end. You can't fake it at twenty-four miles."

The best runners still have that quality—they're driven by obsessions other than wealth. Ryan Hall has quickly become one of the most marketable distance runners in the world, drawing big appearance fees from races. Mary Wittenberg, of the Road Runners, told me that she expected to pay two hundred thousand dollars just to get him on the starting line of the New York marathon in 2009. But he was still in his home town, running the old routes, and his life style had hardly changed. He drove a three-year-old Honda, and his and Sara's modest house in Big Bear Lake had a "For Rent" sign in front, because they leased it out to vacationers whenever they trained elsewhere. In Mammoth Lakes, they lived in a mobile home. "We kind of see the money we have as God's money," Sara told me. They supported a Christian charity called Team World Vision, which gets entrants to the country's major marathons to raise money for development projects in Africa. Once, when I was at lunch with Ryan and Team World Vision organizers, somebody mentioned that marathoners tend to have high incomes. "Really?" Ryan said, his eyes wide. "I didn't know that!"

Few professional runners seemed to realize that their paychecks came from the guys at the back of the pack. Ian Dobson, an Olympian in the five thousand metres who lived mostly on the earnings of a shoe contract, told me that he was under the impression that it was a tax writeoff for somebody. "I don't understand the economics," he said. "I don't understand how it could be worth it for Adidas to pay me." In a way, the sport creates an unusual intimacy between the recreational and the élite: in a marathon, they all gather together on the same starting line. But in truth the top guys are still on the fringes, isolated, pounding out the miles as in the old days. And from the African perspective it couldn't be stranger. Michael Chitwood, the director of Team World Vision, told me that when he went overseas he had trouble explaining his funding. "I go to Africa and say, 'Well, I work with marathoners and we raise money for these projects,'" he said. "They're like, 'What do you mean? You guys don't have that many good runners in America!' I say, 'No, no, no, they're not good runners!'"

On the way to dinner at his parents' home in Big Bear Lake, Ryan Hall asked, "Are you ready to go to the Olympic Village?" His mother, he said, had "gone kinda crazy with the Olympics stuff." An American flag hung in front of the house, and the porch was draped with red-white-and-blue bunting. A banner from the "Run Ryan Run" campaign hung above the front door. Susie Hall had recently tracked down an Olympics flag with the five rings, and she planned to display that, too. The whole Hall clan was going to Beijing in August, along with their pastor and his wife, and Sara's family, for a total entourage of seventeen.

"I told Ryan that he couldn't run the marathon until he was twenty-seven," Susie Hall said at dinner. "Shows how much he listens to me."

I asked her why she had such reservations.

"I don't know if it's good for him," she said. "I worry about him running that far."

"There's absolutely no evidence that running a marathon is bad for a person," Mickey Hall said.

"At least he's not skateboarding," Susie said.

The Hall siblings had all grown up and left home, but they still had regular places at the dinner table. Ryan sat in his childhood seat, right in the middle. Nearby, the hands of the kitchen clock were frozen—years ago he had stopped them at 3:35, because he had been obsessed with running fifteen hundred metres in that time. He never came close, and gravity won that race: the hands had slipped to 4:36.

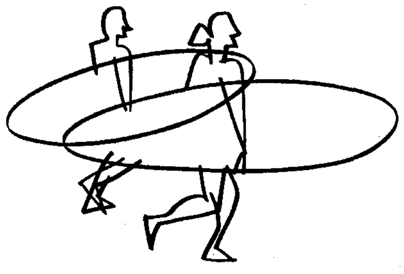
He no longer fixated on numbers and times; at Stanford he had been humbled often enough. And he knew that, on any given day, any number of things could go wrong for a distance runner. The most impressive performance of his career had been at the Olympic Trials, but shortly after the victory he was stunned to learn that Ryan Shay, a fellow competitor, had collapsed and died in the early miles. It's extremely rare for an élite marathoner to die during a race, but Shay had suffered from an enlarged and scarred heart. The day before the Trials, Shay and Hall had gone for a run together, and their wives are close friends and former Stanford teammates.

July would turn out to be a rough month for the Halls, as Sara finished ninth in the Olympic Trials fifteen hundred metres, failing to make the team. The morning after the race, I saw Ryan, who looked tired. "It's a tough thing—what do you say?" he remarked. "I just told her that I love her and I support her. I told her to walk away with her head high. She did everything she possibly could have done." In the men's fifteen hundred metres, Alan Webb also failed to make the team, despite having run some of the best times in the world a year earlier. Even the Ultimate Fighter's camp had a hard weekend—the day before Sara's race, Rampage lost a five-round unanimous decision to Forrest Griffin.

Hall told me that at least his training was going well. The fast runs had been stretched to twelve miles, and often he ran them at the sunniest time of day. Before and after workouts, he tested urine samples with a refractometer to monitor how he coped with dehydration in the buildup to Beijing. In August, the Chinese city's temperature is usually in the mid-eighties, with high humidity, and the men's race isn't scheduled to start until 7:30 A.M. All of China is in a single time zone, so the sun rises early in the east: seven-thirty in Beijing feels more like midmorning. Haile Gebrselassie, the Ethiopian who holds the world record in the marathon, had announced that he wouldn't run the marathon, citing concerns about pollution. Gebrselassie subsequently petitioned the Olympic Committee for changes to the route and the start time, but it declined.

In Beijing, the favorite will be Martin Lel, a Kenyan who has won the New York City Marathon twice and the London Marathon three times. But heat tends to equalize competitors in a long race, and Olympic marathons are notoriously unpredictable. It's the only distance event that's never been won by a Kenyan, and African marathoners often seem to underperform in the Games. It's unusual to hold such an important race during the summer; all the big-city marathons are scheduled for spring or fall. Most Ethiopian and Kenyan runners come from cool mountain regions, and coaches told me that in the past they've seemed less likely to adjust their training for summer conditions.

In 2004, Meb Keflezighi and Deena Kastor prepared for Athens, where the summer heat can also be brutal, by wearing additional clothing on practice runs at Mammoth Lakes. Their coaches mapped out a route there that mimicked the climbs and descents of the Greek course, so the athletes essentially ran the Athenian hills in the thin air of the Sierra Nevada. This year, Deena Kastor had made the team again, and she and Hall were following many of the same strategies. They had acquired ice vests that would lower the body's temperature immediately before the start of the race. The U.S. Olympic team had given each athlete two different filtering masks to wear at the Olympic Village if pollution was bad. ("One for training and one for kicking around," Ryan said.) The course in Beijing is completely flat, and many sections are exposed, so this time the coaches had mapped out a route in Bishop, California, a high-desert town at the edge of the Sierra Nevada. Bishop is flat and sunny: exactly like Beijing if all the people and cars and buildings were replaced by scrubland.



In Big Bear Lake, after we had dinner at his parents' home, Ryan played a DVD of the Beijing course. An official with the U.S. team had recently travelled to China to record it with a handheld camera. The video began with a shot of Tiananmen Square: throngs of tourists, the portrait of Mao Zedong. That was where the starting line would be. Then the cameraman headed south past the Qianmen intersection. For much of the route he travelled on foot; sometimes he caught a cab. Traffic was everywhere: buses and cars, mopeds and bicycles. Kids grinned at the camera; people stopped to stare. In Tiantan Park, a tout pulled out a box of fake Rolexes.

Ryan watched the video intently. "Meb cut his shirt in Athens," he said. "He cut it off at his stomach, because otherwise the sweat will pool there."

More than thirty years after Frank Shorter, marathoners were still tinkering with their uniforms, looking for that slight advantage, mesh or no mesh.

"That's what I ran in for the Ironman," Mickey Hall said.

"If I'm running with the midriff, it'll be the supreme sacrifice."

"You know, Ryan, I think you get in there and you're in the thick of it, and that's all that matters."

"Definitely," he said, in that slow California way, and then he grinned. "I just hate the look." ♦

ANNALS OF CRIME

THE CHAMELEON

The many lives of Frédéric Bourdin.

BY DAVID GRANN

On May 3, 2005, in France, a man called an emergency hot line for missing and exploited children. He frantically explained that he was a tourist passing through Orthez, near the western Pyrenees, and that at the train station he had encountered a fifteen-year-old boy who was alone, and terrified. Another hot line received a similar call, and the boy eventually arrived, by himself, at a local government child-welfare office. Slender and short, with pale skin and trembling hands, he wore a muffler around much of his face and had a baseball cap pulled over his eyes. He had no money and carried little more than a cell phone and an I.D., which said that his name was Francisco Hernandez Fernandez and that he was born on December 13, 1989, in Cáceres, Spain. Initially, he barely spoke, but after some prodding he revealed that his parents and younger brother had been killed in a car accident. The crash left him in a coma for several weeks and, upon recovering, he was sent to live with an uncle, who abused him. Finally, he fled to France, where his mother had grown up.

French authorities placed Francisco at the St. Vincent de Paul shelter in the nearby city of Pau. A state-run institution that housed about thirty-five boys and girls, most of whom had been either removed from dysfunctional families or abandoned, the shelter was in an old stone building with peeling white wooden shutters; on the roof was a statue of St. Vincent protecting a child in the folds of his gown. Francisco was given a single room, and he seemed relieved to be able to wash and change in private: his head and body, he explained, were covered in burns and scars from the car accident. He was enrolled at the Collège Jean Monnet, a local secondary school that had four hundred or so students, mostly from tough neighborhoods, and that had a reputation for violence. Although students were forbidden to wear hats, the principal at the time, Claire Chadourne, made an exception for Francisco, who said that he feared being teased about his scars. Like many of the social workers and teachers who dealt with Francisco, Chadourne, who had been an educator for more than thirty years, felt protective toward him. With his baggy pants and his cell phone dangling from a cord around his neck, he looked like a typical teen-ager, but he seemed deeply traumatized. He never changed his clothes in front of the other students in gym class, and resisted being subjected to a medical exam. He spoke softly, with his head bowed, and recoiled if anyone tried to touch him.

Gradually, Francisco began hanging out with other kids at recess and participating in class. Since he had enrolled so late in the school year, his literature teacher asked another student, Rafael Pessoa De Almeida, to help him with his coursework. Before long, Francisco was helping Rafael. "This guy can learn like lightning," Rafael recalls thinking.

One day after school, Rafael asked Francisco if he wanted to go ice-skating, and the two became friends, playing video games and sharing school gossip. Rafael sometimes picked on his younger brother, and Francisco, recalling that he used to mistreat his own sibling, advised, "Make sure you love your brother and stay close."

At one point, Rafael borrowed Francisco's cell phone; to his surprise, its address book and call log were protected by security codes. When Rafael returned the phone, Francisco displayed a photograph on its screen of a young boy who looked just like Francisco. "That's my brother," he said.

Francisco was soon one of the most popular kids in school, dazzling classmates with his knowledge of music and arcane slang—he even knew American idioms—and moving effortlessly between rival cliques. "The students loved him," a teacher recalls. "He had this aura about him, this charisma."

During tryouts for a talent show, the music teacher asked Francisco if he was interested in performing. He handed her a CD to play, then walked to the end of the room and tilted his hat flamboyantly, waiting for the music to start. As Michael Jackson's song "Unbreakable" filled the room, Francisco started to dance like the pop star, twisting his limbs and lip-synching the words "You can't believe it, you can't conceive it / And you can't touch me, 'cause I'm untouchable." Everyone in the room watched in awe. "He didn't just look like Michael Jackson," the music teacher subsequently recalled. "He *was* Michael Jackson."

Later, in computer class, Francisco showed Rafael an Internet image of a small reptile with a slithery tongue.

"What is it?" Rafael asked.

"A chameleon," Francisco replied.

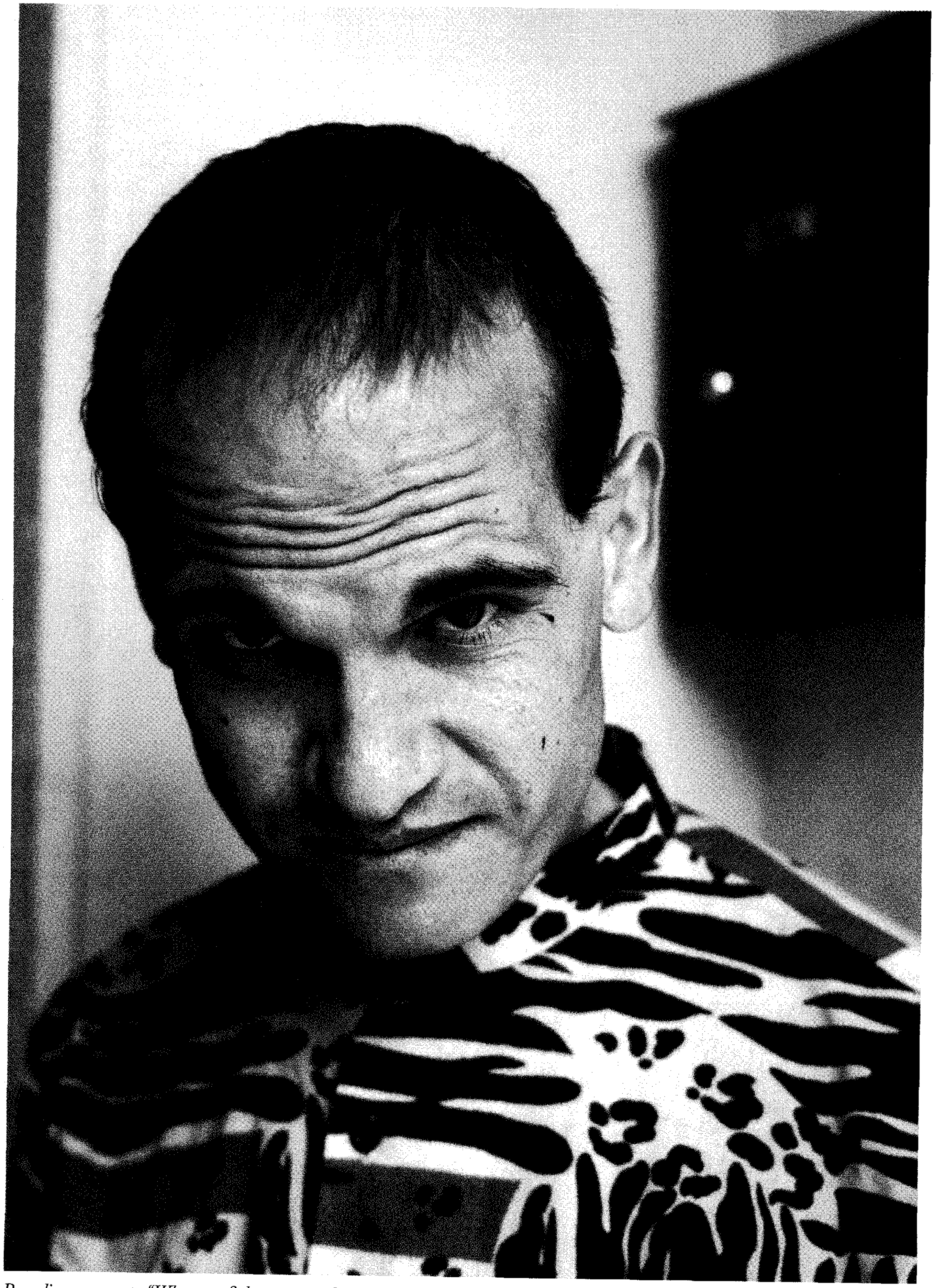
On June 8th, an administrator rushed into the principal's office. She said that she had been watching a television program the other night about one of the world's most infamous impostors: Frédéric Bourdin, a thirty-year-old Frenchman who serially impersonated children. "I swear to God, Bourdin looks exactly like Francisco Hernandez Fernandez," the administrator said.

Chadourne was incredulous: thirty would make Francisco older than some of her teachers. She did a quick Internet search for "Frédéric Bourdin." Hundreds of news items came up about the "king of impostors" and the "master of new identities," who, like Peter Pan, "didn't want to grow up." A photograph of Bourdin closely resembled Francisco—there was the same formidable chin, the same gap between the front teeth. Chadourne called the police.

"Are you sure it's him?" an officer asked.

"No, but I have this strange feeling."

When the police arrived, Chadourne



Bourdin once wrote, "When you fight monsters, be careful that . . . you do not become one." Photograph by François-Marie Banier.

sent the assistant principal to summon Francisco from class. As Francisco entered Chadourne's office, the police seized him and thrust him against the wall, causing her to panic: what if he really was an abused orphan? Then, while handcuffing Bourdin, the police removed his baseball cap. There were no scars on his head; rather, he was going bald. "I want a lawyer," he said, his voice suddenly dropping to that of a man.

At police headquarters, he admitted that he was Frédéric Bourdin, and that in the past decade and a half he had invented scores of identities, in more than fifteen countries and five languages. His aliases included Benjamin Kent, Jimmy Morins, Alex Dole, Sladjan Raskovic, Arnaud Orions, Giovanni Petrullo, and Michelangelo Martini. News reports claimed that he had even impersonated a tiger tamer and a priest, but, in truth, he had nearly always played a similar character: an abused or abandoned child. He was unusually adept at transforming his appearance—his facial hair, his weight, his walk, his mannerisms. "I can become whatever I want," he liked to say. In 2004, when he pretended to be a fourteen-year-old French boy in the town of Grenoble, a doctor who examined him at the request of authorities concluded that he was, indeed, a teen-ager. A police captain in Pau noted, "When he talked in Spanish, he became a Spaniard. When he talked in English, he was an Englishman." Chadourne said of him, "Of course, he lied, but what an actor!"

Over the years, Bourdin had insinuated himself into youth shelters, orphanages, foster homes, junior high schools, and children's hospitals. His trail of cons extended to, among other places, Spain, Germany, Belgium, England, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Switzerland, Bosnia, Portugal, Austria, Slovakia, France, Sweden, Denmark, and America. The U.S. State Department warned that he was an "exceedingly clever" man who posed as a desperate child in order to "win sympathy," and a French prosecutor called him "an incredible illusionist whose perversity is matched only by his intelligence." Bourdin himself has said, "I am a manipulator. . . . My job is to manipulate."

In Pau, the authorities launched an investigation to determine why a thirty-year-old man would pose as a teen-age orphan. They found no evidence of sexual deviance or pedophilia; they did not uncover any financial motive, either. "In my twenty-two years on the job, I've never seen a case like it," Eric Maurel, the prosecutor, told me. "Usually people con for money. His profit seems to have been purely emotional."

On his right forearm, police discovered a tattoo. It said "*caméléon nantais*"—"Chameleon from Nantes."

"Mr. Grann," Bourdin said, politely extending his hand to me. We were on a street in the center of Pau, where he had agreed to meet me one morning last fall. For once, he seemed unmistakably an adult, with a faint five-o'-clock shadow. He was dressed theatrically, in white pants, a white shirt, a checkered vest, white shoes, a blue satin bow tie, and a foppish hat. Only the gap between his teeth evoked the memory of Francisco Hernandez Fernandez.

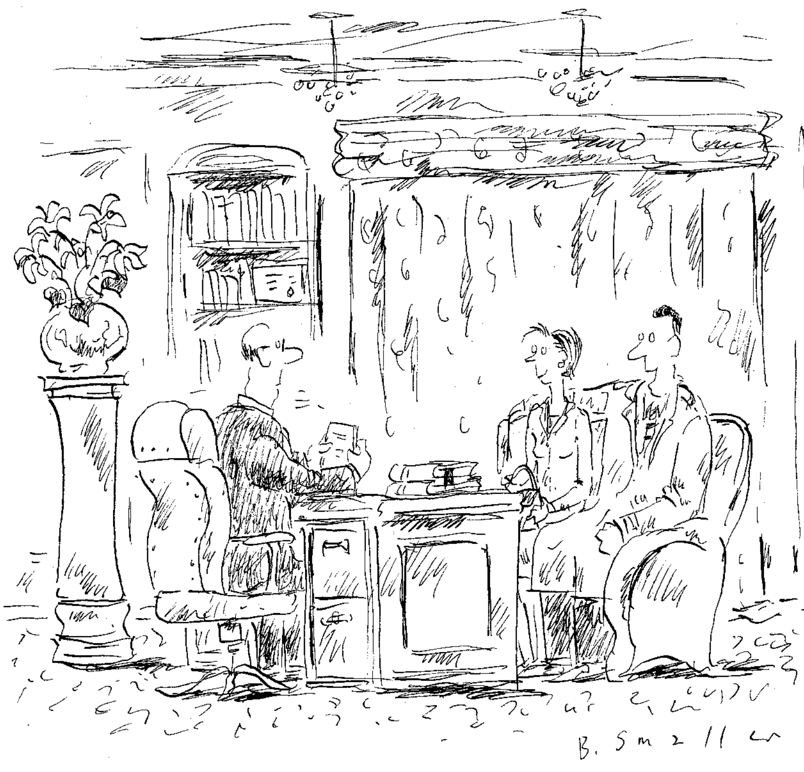
After his ruse in Pau had been exposed, Bourdin moved to a village in the Pyrenees, twenty-five miles away. "I wanted to escape from all the glare," he said. As had often been the case with Bourdin's deceptions, the authorities were not sure how to punish him. Psychiatrists determined that he was sane. ("Is he a psychopath?" one doctor testified. "Absolutely not.") No statute seemed to fit his crime. Ultimately, he was charged with obtaining and using a fake I.D., and received a six-month suspended sentence.

A local reporter, Xavier Sota, told me that since then Bourdin had periodically appeared in Pau, always in a different guise. Sometimes he had a mustache or a beard. Sometimes his hair was tightly cropped; at other times, it was straggly. Sometimes he dressed like a rapper, and on other occasions like a businessman. "It was as if he were trying to find a new character to inhabit," Sota said.

Bourdin and I sat down on a bench near the train station, as a light rain began to fall. A car paused by the curb in front of us, with a couple inside. They rolled down the window, peered out, and said to each other, "*Le Caméléon*."

"I am quite famous in France these days," Bourdin said. "Too famous."

As we spoke, his large brown eyes flitted across me, seemingly taking me in. One of his police interrogators called him a "human recorder." To my surprise, Bourdin knew where I had worked, where I was born, the name of my wife, even what my sister and brother



"We'd like you to leave out the poorer, sickness, and death parts—they're a little dark."

did for a living. "I like to know whom I'm meeting," he said.

Aware of how easy it is to deceive others, he was paranoid of being a mark. "I don't trust anybody," he said. For a person who described himself as a "professional liar," he seemed oddly fastidious about the facts of his own life. "I don't want you to make me into somebody I'm not," he said. "The story is good enough without embellishment."

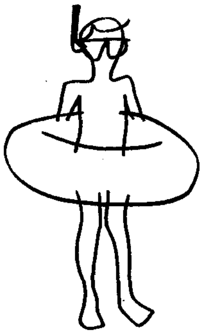
I knew that Bourdin had grown up in and around Nantes, and I asked him about his tattoo. Why would someone who tried to erase his identity leave a trace of one? He rubbed his arm where the words were imprinted on his skin. Then he said, "I will tell you the truth behind all my lies."

Before he was Benjamin Kent or Michelangelo Martini—before he was the child of an English judge or an Italian diplomat—he was Frédéric Pierre Bourdin, the illegitimate son of Ghislaine Bourdin, who was eighteen and poor when she gave birth to him, in a suburb of Paris, on June 13, 1974. On government forms, Frédéric's father is often listed as "X," meaning that his identity was unknown. But Ghislaine, during an interview at her small house, in a rural area in western France, told me that "X" was a twenty-five-year-old Algerian immigrant named Kaci, whom she had met at a margarine factory where they both worked. (She says that she can no longer remember his last name.) After she became pregnant, she discovered that Kaci was already married, and so she left her job and did not tell him that she was carrying his child.

Ghislaine raised Frédéric until he was two and a half—"He was like any other child, totally normal," she says—at which time child services intervened at the behest of her parents. A relative says of Ghislaine, "She liked to drink and dance and stay out at night. She didn't want anything to do with that child." Ghislaine insists that she had obtained another factory job and was perfectly competent, but the judge placed Frédéric in her parents' custody. Years later, Ghislaine wrote Frédéric a letter, telling him, "You are my son and they stole you from me at the age of two. They did everything to separate us from each other and we have become two strangers."

Frédéric says that his mother had a dire need for attention and, on the rare occasions that he saw her, she would feign being deathly ill and make him run to get help. "To see me frightened gave her pleasure," he says. Though Ghislaine denies this, she acknowledges that she once attempted suicide and her son had to rush to find assistance.

When Frédéric was five, he moved with his grandparents to Mouchamps, a hamlet southeast of Nantes. Frédéric—part Algerian and fatherless, and dressed in secondhand clothes from Catholic charities—was a village outcast, and in school he began to tell fabulous stories about himself. He said that his father was never around because he was a "British secret agent." One of his elementary-school teachers, Yvon Bourgueil, describes Bourdin as a precocious and captivating child, who had an extraordinary imagination and visual sense, drawing wild, beautiful comic strips. "He had this way of making you connect to him," Bourgueil recalls. He also noticed signs of mental distress. At one point, Frédéric told his grandparents that he had been molested by a neighbor, though nobody in the tightly knit village investigated the allegation. In one of his comic strips, Frédéric depicted himself drowning in a river. He increasingly misbehaved, acting out in class and stealing from neighbors. At twelve, he was sent to live at Les Grézillières, a private facility for juveniles, in Nantes.



There, his "little dramas," as one of his teachers called them, became more fanciful. Bourdin often pretended to be an amnesiac, intentionally getting lost in the streets. In 1990, after he turned sixteen, Frédéric was forced to move to another youth home, and he soon ran away. He hitchhiked to Paris, where, scared and hungry, he invented his first fake character: he approached a police officer and told him that he was a lost British teen named Jimmy Sale. "I dreamed they would send me to England, where I always imagined life was more beautiful," he recalls. When the police discovered that he spoke almost no English, he admitted his deceit and was returned to the youth home. But he had devised what he calls his "technique," and in this fashion he began to wander across Europe, moving in and out of orphanages and foster homes, searching for the "perfect shelter." In 1991, he was found in a train station in Langres, France, pretending to be sick, and was placed in a children's hospital in Saint-Dizier. According to his medical report, no one knew "who he was or where he came from." Answering questions only in writing, he indicated that his name was Frédéric Cassis—a play on his real father's first name, Kaci. Frédéric's doctor, Jean-Paul Milanese, wrote in a letter to a child-welfare judge, "We find ourselves confronted with a young runaway teen, mute, having broken with his former life."

On a piece of paper, Bourdin scribbled what he wanted most: "A home and a school. That's all."

When doctors started to unravel his past, a few months later, Bourdin confessed his real identity and moved on. "I would rather leave on my own than be taken away," he told me. During his career as an impostor, Bourdin often voluntarily disclosed the truth, as if the attention that came from exposure were as thrilling as the con itself.

On June 13, 1992, after he had posed as more than a dozen fictional children, Bourdin turned eighteen, becoming a legal adult. "I'd been in shelters and foster homes most of my life, and suddenly I was told, 'That's it. You're free to go,'" he recalls. "How could I become something I could not imagine?" In November, 1993, posing as a mute child, he lay down in the middle of a street in the French town of Auch and was taken by firemen to a hospital. *La Dépêche du Midi*, a local newspaper, ran a story about him, asking, "Where does this mute adolescent . . . come from?" The next day, the paper published another article, under the headline "THE MUTE ADOLESCENT WHO APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE HAS STILL NOT REVEALED HIS SECRET." After fleeing, he was caught attempting a similar ruse nearby and admitted that he was Frédéric Bourdin. "THE MUTE OF AUCH SPEAKS FOUR LANGUAGES," *La Dépêche du Midi* proclaimed.

As Bourdin assumed more and more identities, he attempted to kill off his real one. One day, the mayor of Mouchamps received a call from the "German police" notifying him that Bourdin's body had been found in Munich. When Bourdin's mother was told the news, she recalls, "My heart stopped." Members of Bourdin's family waited for a coffin to arrive, but it never did. "It was Frédéric playing one of his cruel games," his mother says.

By the mid-nineties, Bourdin had accumulated a criminal record for lying to police and magistrates, and Interpol and other authorities were increasingly on the lookout for him. His activities were also garnering media attention. In 1995, the producers of a popular French television show called "Everything Is Possible" invited him on the program. As Bourdin appeared onstage, looking pale and prepubescent, the host teasingly asked the audience, "What's this boy's name? Michael, Jürgen, Kevin, or Pedro? What's his real age—thirteen, fourteen, fifteen?" Pressed about his motivations, Bourdin again insisted that all he wanted was love and a family. It was the same rationale he always gave, and, as a result, he was the rare impostor who elicited sympathy as well as anger from those he had duped. (His mother has a less charitable interpretation of her son's stated motive: "He wants to justify what he has become.")

The producers of "Everything Is Possible" were so affected by his story that they offered him a job in the station's newsroom, but he soon ran off to create more "interior fictions," as one of the producers later told a reporter. At times, Bourdin's deceptions were viewed in existential terms. One of his devotees in France created a Web site that celebrated his shape-shifting, hailing him as an "actor of life and an apostle of a new philosophy of human identity."

One day when I was visiting Bourdin, he described how he transformed himself into a child. Like the impostors he had seen in films such as "Catch Me If You Can," he tried to elevate his criminality into an "art." First, he said, he conceived of a child whom he wanted to play. Then he gradually mapped out the character's biography, from his heritage to his family to his tics. "The key is actually not lying about everything," Bourdin said. "Otherwise, you'll just mix things up." He said that he adhered to maxims such as "Keep it simple" and "A good liar uses the truth." In choosing a name, he preferred one that carried a deep association in his memory, like Cassis. "The one thing you better not forget is your name," he said.

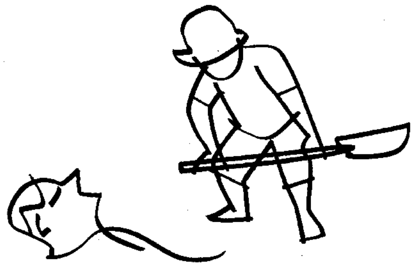
He compared what he did to being a spy: you changed superficial details while keeping your core intact. This approach not only made it easier to convince people; it allowed him to protect a part of his self, to hold on to some moral center. "I know I can be cruel, but I don't want to become a monster," he said.

Once he had imagined a character, he fashioned a commensurate appearance—meticulously shaving his face, plucking his eyebrows, using hair-removal creams. He often put on baggy pants and a shirt with long sleeves that swallowed his wrists, emphasizing his smallness. Peering in a mirror, he asked himself if others would see what he wanted them to see. "The worst thing you can do is deceive yourself," he said.

When he honed an identity, it was crucial to find some element of the character that he shared—a technique employed by many actors. "People always say to me, 'Why don't you become an actor?'" he told me. "I think I would be a very good actor, like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Sylvester Stallone. But I don't want to play somebody. I want to *be* somebody."

In order to help ease his character into the real world, he fostered the illusion among local authorities that his character actually existed. As he had done in Orthez, he would call a hot line and claim to have seen the character in a perilous situation. The authorities were less likely to grill a child who appeared to be in distress. If someone noticed that Bourdin looked oddly mature, however, he did not object. "A teen-ager wants to look older," he said. "I treat it like a compliment."

Though he emphasized his cunning, he acknowledged what any con man knows but rarely admits: it is not that hard to fool people. People have basic expectations of others' behavior and are rarely on guard for someone to subvert them. By playing on some primal need—vanity, greed, loneliness—men like Bourdin make their mark further suspend disbelief. As a result, most cons are filled with logical inconsistencies, even absurdities, which seem humiliatingly obvious after the fact. Bourdin, who generally tapped into a mark's sense of goodness rather than into some darker urge, says, "Nobody expects a seemingly vulnerable child to be lying."



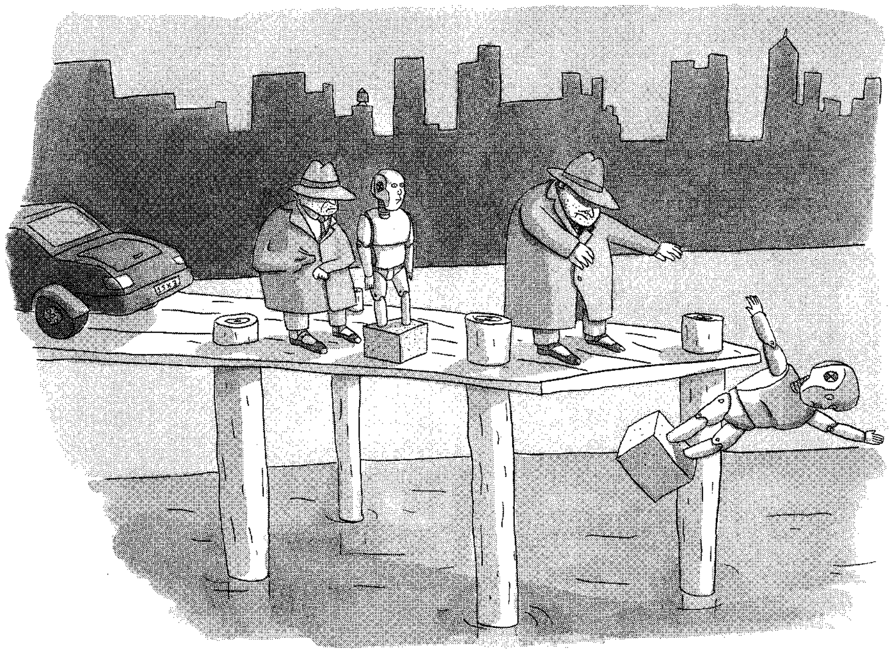
In October, 1997, Bourdin told me, he was at a youth home in Linares, Spain. A child-welfare judge who was handling his case had given him twenty-four hours to prove that he was a teen-ager; otherwise, she would take his fingerprints, which were on file with Interpol. Bourdin knew that, as an adult with a criminal record, he would likely face prison. He had already tried to run away once and was caught, and the staff was keeping an eye on his whereabouts. And so he did something that both stretched the bounds of credulity and threatened to transform him into the kind of "monster" that he had insisted he never wanted to become. Rather than invent an identity, he stole one. He assumed the persona of a missing sixteen-year-old boy from Texas. Bourdin, now twenty-three, not only had to convince the authorities that he was an American child; he had to convince the missing boy's family.

According to Bourdin, the plan came to him in the middle of the night: if he could fool the judge into thinking that he was an American, he might be let go. He asked permission to use the telephone in the shelter's office and called the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, in Alexandria, Virginia, trolling for a real identity. Speaking in English, which he had picked up during his travels, he claimed that his name was Jonathan Durean and that he was a director of the Linares shelter. He said that a frightened child had turned up who would not disclose his identity but who spoke English with an American accent. Bourdin offered a description of the boy that matched himself—short, slight, prominent chin, brown hair, a gap between his teeth—and asked if the center had anyone similar in its database. After searching, Bourdin recalls, a woman at the center said that the boy might be Nicholas Barclay, who had been reported missing in San Antonio on June 13, 1994, at the age of thirteen. Barclay was last seen, according to his file, wearing "a white T-shirt, purple pants, black tennis shoes and carrying a pink backpack."

Adopting a skeptical tone, Bourdin says, he asked if the center could send any more information that it had regarding Barclay. The woman said that she would mail overnight Barclay's missing-person flyer and immediately fax a copy as well. After giving her the fax number in the office he was borrowing, Bourdin says, he hung up and waited. Peeking out the door, he looked to see if anyone was coming. The hallway was dark and quiet, but he could hear footsteps. At last, a copy of the flyer emerged from the fax machine. The printout was so faint that most of it was illegible. Still, the photograph's resemblance to him did not seem that far off. "I can do this," Bourdin recalls thinking. He quickly called back the center, he says, and told the woman, "I have some good news. Nicholas Barclay is standing right beside me."

Elated, she gave him the number of the officer in the San Antonio Police Department who was in charge of the investigation. This time pretending to be a Spanish policeman, Bourdin says, he phoned the officer and, mentioning details about Nicholas that he had learned from the woman at the center—such as the pink backpack—declared that the missing child had been found. The officer said that he would contact the F.B.I. and the U.S. Embassy in Madrid. Bourdin had not fully contemplated what he was about to unleash.

The next day at the Linares shelter, Bourdin intercepted a package from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children addressed to Jonathan Durean. He ripped open the envelope. Inside was a clean copy of Nicholas Barclay's missing-person flyer. It showed a color photograph of a small, fair-skinned boy with blue eyes and brown hair so light that it appeared almost blond. The flyer listed several identifying features, including a cross tattooed between Barclay's right index finger and thumb. Bourdin stared at the picture and said to himself, "I'm dead." Not only did Bourdin not have the same tattoo; his eyes and hair were dark brown. In haste, he burned the flyer in the shelter's courtyard, then went into the bathroom and bleached his hair. Finally, he had a friend, using a needle and ink from a pen, give him a makeshift tattoo resembling Barclay's.



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Still, there was the matter of Bourdin's eyes. He tried to conceive of a story that would explain his appearance. What if he had been abducted by a child sex ring and flown to Europe, where he had been tortured and abused, even experimented on? Yes, that could explain the eyes. His kidnappers had injected his pupils with chemicals. He had lost his Texas accent because, for more than three years of captivity, he had been forbidden to speak English. He had escaped from a locked room in a house in Spain when a guard carelessly left the door open. It was a crazy tale, one that violated his maxim to "keep it simple," but it would have to do.

Soon after, the phone in the office rang. Bourdin took the call. It was Nicholas Barclay's thirty-one-year-old half sister, Carey Gibson. "My God, Nicky, is that you?" she asked.

Bourdin didn't know how to respond. He adopted a muffled voice, then said, "Yes, it's me."

Nicholas's mother, Beverly, got on the phone. A tough, heavyset woman with a broad face and dyed-brown hair, she worked the graveyard shift at a Dunkin' Donuts in San Antonio seven nights a week. She had never married Nicholas's father and had raised Nicholas with her two older children, Carey and Jason. (She was divorced from Carey and Jason's father, though she still used her married name, Dollarhide.) A heroin addict, she had struggled during Nicholas's youth to get off drugs. After he disappeared, she had begun to use heroin again and was now addicted to methadone. Despite these difficulties, Carey says, Beverly was not a bad mother: "She was maybe the most functioning drug addict. We had nice things, a nice place, never went without food." Perhaps compensating for the instability in her life, Beverly fanatically followed a routine: working at the doughnut shop from 10 P.M. to 5 A.M., then stopping at the Make My Day Lounge to shoot pool and have a few beers, before going home to sleep. She had a hardness about her, with a cigarette-roughened voice, but people who know her also spoke to me of her kindness. After her night shift, she delivered any leftover doughnuts to a homeless shelter.

Beverly pulled the phone close to her ear. After the childlike voice on the other end said that he wanted to come home, she told me, "I was dumbfounded and blown away."

Carey, who was married and had two children of her own, had often held the family together during Beverly's struggles with drug addiction. Since Nicholas's disappearance, her mother and brother had never seemed the same, and

"And cc the rest of the food chain."

all Carey wanted was to make the family whole again. She volunteered to go to Spain to bring Nicholas home, and the packing-and-shipping company where she worked in sales support offered to pay her fare.

When she arrived at the shelter, a few days later, accompanied by an official from the U.S. Embassy, Bourdin had secluded himself in a room. What he had done, he concedes, was evil. But if he had any moral reservations they did not stop him, and after wrapping his face in a scarf and putting on a hat and sunglasses he came out of the room. He was sure that Carey would instantly realize that he wasn't her brother. Instead, she rushed toward him and hugged him.

Carey was, in many ways, an ideal mark. "My daughter has the best heart and is so easy to manipulate," Beverly says. Carey had never travelled outside the United States, except for partying in Tijuana, and was unfamiliar with European accents and with Spain. After Nicholas disappeared, she had often watched television news programs about lurid child abductions. In addition to feeling the pressure of having received money from her company to make the trip, she had the burden of deciding, as her family's representative, whether this was her long-lost brother.

Though Bourdin referred to her as "Carey" rather than "sis," as Nicholas always had, and though he had a trace of a French accent, Carey says that she had little doubt that it was Nicholas. Not when he could attribute any inconsistencies to his unspeakable ordeal. Not when his nose now looked so much like her uncle Pat's. Not when he had the same tattoo as Nicholas and seemed to know so many details about her family, asking about relatives by name. "Your heart takes over and you want to believe," Carey says.

She showed Bourdin photographs of the family and he studied each one: this is my mother; this is my half brother; this is my grandfather.

Neither American nor Spanish officials raised any questions once Carey had vouched for him. Nicholas had been gone for only three years, and the F.B.I. was not primed to be suspicious of someone claiming to be a missing child. (The agency told me that, to its knowledge, it had never worked on a case like Bourdin's before.) According to authorities in Madrid, Carey swore under oath that Bourdin was her brother and an American citizen. He was granted a U.S. passport and, the next day, he was on a flight to San Antonio.

For a moment, Bourdin fantasized that he was about to become part of a real family, but halfway to America he began to "freak out," as Carey puts it, trembling and sweating. As she tried to comfort him, he told her that he thought the plane was going to crash, which, he later said, is what he wanted: how else could he escape from what he had done?

When the plane landed, on October 18, 1997, members of Nicholas's family were waiting for him at the airport. Bourdin recognized them from Carey's photographs: Beverly, Nicholas's mother; Carey's then husband, Bryan Gibson; Bryan and Carey's fourteen-year-old son, Codey, and their ten-year-old daughter, Chantel. Only Nicholas's brother, Jason, who was a recovering drug addict and living in San Antonio, was absent. A friend of the family videotaped the reunion, and Bourdin can be seen bundled up, his hat pulled down, his brown eyes shielded by sunglasses, his already fading tattoo covered by gloves. Though Bourdin had thought that Nicholas's relatives were going to "hang" him, they rushed to embrace him, saying how much they had missed him. "We were all just emotionally crazy," Codey recalls. Nicholas's mother, however, hung back. "She just didn't seem excited" the way you'd expect from someone "seeing her son," Chantel told me.

Bourdin wondered if Beverly doubted that he was Nicholas, but eventually she, too, greeted him. They all got in Carey's Lincoln Town Car and stopped at McDonald's for cheeseburgers and fries. As Carey recalls it, "He was just sitting by my mom, talking to my son," saying how much "he missed school and asking when he'd see Jason."

Bourdin went to stay with Carey and Bryan rather than live with Beverly. "I work nights and didn't think it was good to leave him alone," Beverly said. Carey and Bryan owned a trailer home in a desolate wooded area in Spring Branch, thirty-five miles north of San Antonio, and Bourdin stared out the window as the car wound along a dirt road, past rusted trucks on cinder blocks and dogs barking at the sound of the engine. As Codey puts it, "We didn't have no Internet, or stuff like that. You can walk all the way to San Antonio before you get any kind of communication."

Their cramped trailer home was not exactly the vision of America that Bourdin had imagined from movies. He shared a room with Codey, and slept on a foam mattress on the floor. Bourdin knew that, if he were to become Nicholas and to continue to fool even his family, he had to learn everything about him, and he began to mine information, secretly rummaging through drawers and picture albums, and watching home videos. When Bourdin discovered a detail about Nicholas's past from one family member, he would repeat it to another. He pointed out, for example, that Bryan once got mad at Nicholas for knocking Codey out of a tree. "He knew that story," Codey recalls, still amazed by the amount of intelligence that Bourdin acquired about the family. Beverly noticed that Bourdin knelt in front of the television, just as Nicholas had. Various members of the family told me that when Bourdin seemed more standoffish than Nicholas or spoke with a strange accent they assumed that it was because of the terrible treatment that he said he had suffered.

As Bourdin came to inhabit the life of Nicholas, he was struck by what he considered to be uncanny similarities between them. Nicholas had been reported missing on Bourdin's birthday. Both came from poor, broken families; Nicholas had almost no relationship with his father, who for a long time didn't know that Nicholas was his son. Nicholas was a sweet, lonely, combustible kid who craved attention and was often in trouble at school. He had been caught stealing a pair of tennis shoes, and his mother had planned to put him in a youth home. ("I couldn't handle him," Beverly recalls. "I couldn't control him.") When Nicholas was young, he was a diehard Michael Jackson fan who had collected all the singer's records and even owned a red leather jacket like the one Jackson wears in his "Thriller" video.

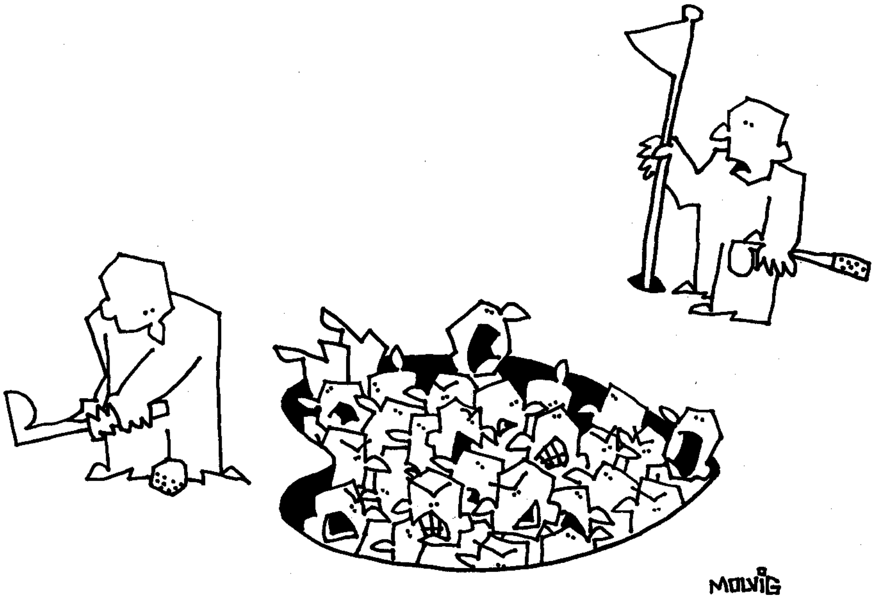
According to Beverly, Bourdin quickly "blended in." He was enrolled in high school and did his homework each night, chastising Codey when he failed to study. He played Nintendo with Codey and watched movies with the family on satellite TV. When he saw Beverly, he hugged her and said, "Hi, Mom." Occasionally on Sundays, he attended church with other members of the family. "He was really nice," Chantel recalls. "Really friendly." Once, when Carey was shooting a home movie of Bourdin, she asked him what he was thinking. "It's really good to have my family and be home again," he replied.

On November 1st, not long after Bourdin had settled into his new home, Charlie Parker, a private investigator, was sitting in his office in San Antonio. The room was crammed with hidden cameras that he deployed in the field: one was attached to a pair of eyeglasses, another was lodged inside a fountain pen, and a third was concealed on the handlebars of a ten-speed bicycle. On a wall hung a photograph that Parker had taken during a stakeout: it showed a married woman with her lover, peeking out of an apartment window. Parker, who had been hired by the woman's husband, called it the "money shot."

Parker's phone rang. It was a television producer from the tabloid show "Hard Copy," who had heard about the extraordinary return of sixteen-year-old Nicholas Barclay and wanted to hire Parker to help investigate the kidnapping. He agreed to take the job.

With silver hair and a raspy voice, Parker, who was then in his late fifties, appeared to have stepped out of a dime novel. When he bought himself a bright-red Toyota convertible, he said to friends, "How ya like that for an old man?" Though Parker had always dreamed about being a P.I., he had only recently become one, having spent thirty years selling lumber and building materials. In 1994, Parker met a San Antonio couple whose twenty-nine-year-old daughter had been raped and fatally stabbed. The case was unsolved, and he began investigating the crime each night after coming home from work. When he discovered that a recently paroled murderer had lived next door to the victim, Parker staked out the man's house, peering out from a white van through infrared goggles. The suspect was soon arrested and ultimately convicted of the murder. Captivated by the experience, Parker formed a "murders club," dedicated to solving cold cases. (Its members included a college psychology professor, a lawyer, and a fry cook.) Within months, the club had uncovered evidence that helped to convict a member of the Air Force who had strangled a fourteen-year-old girl. In 1995, Parker received his license as a private investigator, and he left his life in the lumber business behind.

After Parker spoke with the "Hard Copy" producer, he easily traced Nicholas Barclay to Carey and Bryan's trailer. On November 6th, Parker arrived there with a producer and a camera crew. The family didn't want Bourdin to speak to reporters. "I'm a very private person," Carey says. But Bourdin, who had been in the country for nearly three weeks, agreed to talk. "I wanted the attention at the time," he says. "It was a psycho-



"Keep it out of the mosh pit."

logical need. Today, I wouldn't do it."

Parker stood off to one side, listening intently as the young man relayed his harrowing story. "He was calm as a cucumber," Parker told me. "No looking down, no body language. None." But Parker was puzzled by his curious accent.

Parker spied a photograph on a shelf of Nicholas Barclay as a young boy, and kept looking at it and at the person in front of him, thinking that something was amiss. Having once read that ears are distinct, like fingerprints, he went up to the cameraman and whispered, "Zoom in on his ears. Get 'em as close as you can."

Parker slipped the photograph of Nicholas Barclay into his pocket, and after the interview he hurried back to his office and used a scanner to transfer the photo to his computer; he then studied video from the "Hard Copy" interview. Parker zeroed in on the ears in both pictures. "The ears were close, but they didn't match," he says.

Parker called several ophthalmologists and asked if eyes could be changed from blue to brown by injecting chemicals. The doctors said no. Parker also phoned a dialect expert at Trinity University, in San Antonio, who told him that, even if someone had been held in captivity for three years, he would quickly regain his native accent.

Parker passed on his suspicions to authorities, even though the San Antonio police had declared that "the boy who came back claiming to be Nicholas Barclay is Nicholas Barclay." Fearing that a dangerous stranger was living with Nicholas's family, Parker phoned Beverly and told her what he had discovered. As he recalls the conversation, he said, "It's not him, Ma'am. It's not him."

"What do you mean, it's not him?" she asked.

Parker explained about the ears and the eyes and the accent. In his files, Parker wrote, "Family is upset but maintains that they believe it is their son."

Parker says that a few days later he received an angry call from Bourdin. Although Bourdin denies that he made the call, Parker noted in his file at the time that Bourdin said, "Who do you think you are?" When Parker replied that he didn't believe he was Nicholas, Bourdin shot back, "Immigration thinks it's me. The family thinks it's me."

Parker wondered if he should let the matter go. He had tipped off authorities and was no longer under contract to investigate the matter. He had other cases piling up. And he figured that a mother would know her own son. Still, the boy's accent sounded French, maybe French Moroccan. If so, what was a foreigner doing infiltrating a trailer home in the backwoods of Texas? "I thought he was a terrorist, I swear to God," Parker says.

Beverly rented a small room in a rundown apartment complex in San Antonio, and Parker started to follow Bourdin when he visited her. "I'd set up on the apartment, and watch him come out," Parker says. "He would walk all the way to the bus stop, wearing his Walkman and doing his Michael Jackson moves."

Bourdin was struggling to stay in character. He found living with Carey and Beverly "claustrophobic," and was happiest when he was outside, wandering the streets. "I was not used to being in someone else's family, to live with them like I'm one of theirs," he says. "I wasn't ready for it." One day, Carey and the family presented him with a cardboard box. Inside were Nicholas's baseball cards, records, and various mementos. He picked up each item, gingerly. There was a letter from one of Nicholas's girlfriends. As he read it, he said to himself, "I'm not this boy."

After two months in the United States, Bourdin started to come apart. He was moody and aloof—"weirding out," as Codey put it. He stopped attending classes (one student tauntingly said that he sounded "like a Norwegian") and was consequently suspended. In December, he took off in Bryan and Carey's car and drove to Oklahoma, with the windows down, listening to Michael Jackson's song "Scream": "Tired of the schemes / The lies are disgusting . . . / Somebody please have mercy / 'Cause I just can't take it." The police pulled him over for speeding, and he was arrested. Beverly, Carey, and Bryan picked him up at the police station and brought him home.

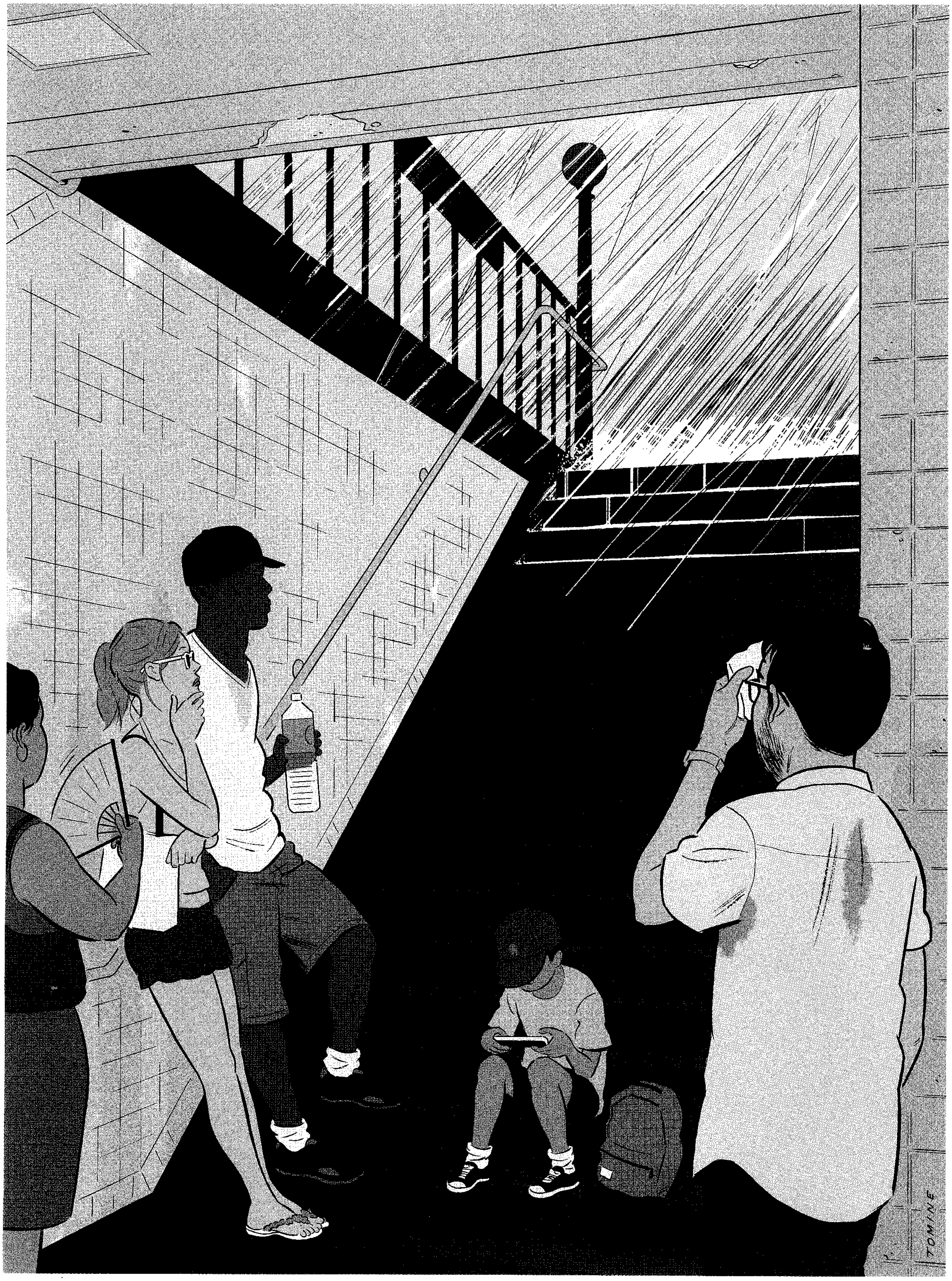
According to his real mother, Ghislaine, Bourdin called her in Europe. For all his disagreements with his mother, Bourdin still seemed to long for her. (He once wrote her a letter, saying, "I don't want to lose you. . . . If you disappear then I disappear.") Ghislaine says Bourdin confided that he was living with a woman in Texas who believed that he was her son. She became so upset that she hung up.

Shortly before Christmas, Bourdin went into the bathroom and looked at himself in the mirror—at his brown eyes, his dyed hair. He grabbed a razor and began to mutilate his face. He was put in the psychiatric ward of a local hospital for several days of observation. Later, Bourdin wrote in a notebook, "When you fight monsters, be careful that in the process you do not become one." He also jotted down a poem: "My days are phantom days, each one the shadow of a hope; / My real life never was begun, / Nor any of my real deeds done."

Doctors judged Bourdin to be stable enough to return to Carey's trailer. But he remained disquieted, and increasingly wondered what had happened to the real Nicholas Barclay. So did Parker, who, while trying to identify Bourdin, had started to gather information and interview Nicholas's neighbors. At the time that Nicholas disappeared, he was living with Beverly in a small one-story house in San Antonio. Nicholas's half brother, Jason, who was then twenty-four, had recently moved in with them after living for a period with his cousin, in Utah. Jason was wiry and strong, with long brown curly hair and a comb often tucked in the back pocket of his jeans. He had burn marks on his body and face: at thirteen, he had lit a cigarette after filling a lawn mower with gasoline and accidentally set himself on fire. Because of his scars, Carey says, "Jason worried that he would never meet somebody and he would always be alone." He strummed Lynyrd Skynyrd songs on his guitar and was a capable artist who sketched portraits of friends. Though he had only completed high school, he was bright and articulate. He also had an addictive personality, like his mother, often drinking heavily and using cocaine. He had his "demons," as Carey put it.

On June 13, 1994, Beverly and Jason told police that Nicholas had been playing basketball three days earlier and called his house from a pay phone, wanting a ride home. Beverly was sleeping, so Jason answered the phone. He told Nicholas to walk home. Nicholas never made it. Because Nicholas had

SKETCHBOOK BY ADRIAN TOMINE



recently fought with his mother over the tennis shoes he had stolen, and over the possibility of being sent to a home for juveniles, the police initially thought that he had run away—even though he hadn't taken any money or possessions.

Parker was surprised by police reports showing that after Nicholas's disappearance there were several disturbances at Beverly's house. On July 12th, she called the police, though when an officer arrived she insisted that she was all right. Jason told the officer that his mother was "drinking and scream[ing] at him because her other son ran away." A few weeks later, Beverly called the police again, about what authorities described as "family violence." The officer on the scene reported that Beverly and Jason were "exchanging words"; Jason was asked to leave the house for the day, and he complied. On September 25th, police received another call, this time from Jason. He claimed that his younger brother had returned and tried to break into the garage, fleeing when Jason spotted him. In his report, the officer on duty said that he had "checked the area" for Nicholas but was "unable to locate him."

Jason's behavior grew even more erratic. He was arrested for "using force" against a police officer, and Beverly kicked him out of the house. Nicholas's disappearance, Codey told me, had "messed Jason up pretty bad. He went on a bad drug binge and was shooting cocaine for a long time." Because he had refused to help Nicholas get a ride home on the day he vanished, Chantel says, Jason had "a lot of guilt."

In late 1996, Jason checked into a rehabilitation center and weaned himself from drugs. After he finished the program, he remained at the facility for more than a year, serving as a counsellor and working for a landscaping business that the center operated. He was still there when Bourdin turned up, claiming to be his missing brother.

Bourdin wondered why Jason had not met him at the airport and had initially made no effort to see him at Carey's. After a month and a half, Bourdin and family members say, Jason finally came for a visit. Even then, Codey says, "Jason was standoffish." Though Jason gave him a hug in front of the others, Bourdin says, he seemed to eye him warily. After a few minutes, Jason told him to come outside, and held out his hand to Bourdin. A necklace with a gold cross glittered in his palm. Jason said that it was for him. "It was like he had to give it to me," Bourdin says. Jason put it around his neck. Then he said goodbye, and never returned.

Bourdin told me, "It was clear that Jason knew what had happened to Nicholas." For the first time, Bourdin began to wonder who was conning whom.

The authorities, meanwhile, had started to doubt Bourdin's story. Nancy Fisher, who at the time was a veteran F.B.I. agent, had interviewed Bourdin several weeks after he arrived in the United States, in order to document his allegations of being kidnapped on American soil. Immediately, she told me, she "smelled a rat": "His hair was dark but bleached blond and the roots were quite obvious."

Parker knew Fisher and had shared with her his own suspicions. Fisher warned Parker not to interfere with a federal probe, but as they conducted parallel investigations they developed a sense of trust, and Parker passed on any information he obtained. When Fisher made inquiries into who may have abducted Nicholas and sexually abused him, she says, she found Beverly oddly "surly and uncoöperative."

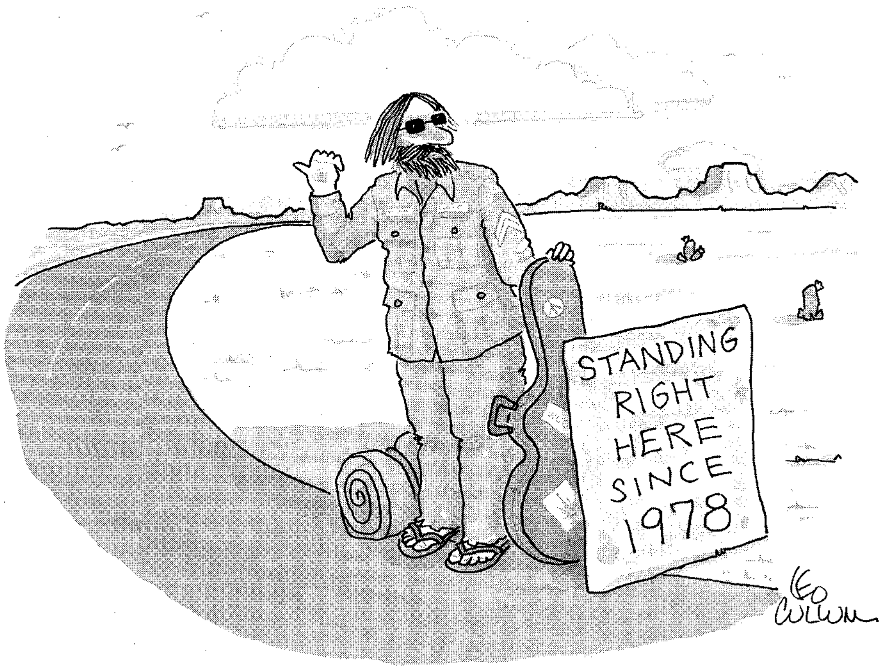
Fisher wondered whether Beverly and her family simply wanted to believe that Bourdin was their loved one. Whatever the family's motivations, Fisher's main concern was the mysterious figure who had entered the United States. She knew that it was impossible for him to have altered his eye color. In November, under the pretext of getting Bourdin treatment for his alleged abuse, Fisher took him to see a forensic psychiatrist in Houston, who concluded from his syntax and grammar that he could not be American, and was most likely French or Spanish. The F.B.I. shared the results with Beverly and Carey, Fisher says, but they insisted that he was Nicholas.

Believing that Bourdin was a spy, Fisher says, she contacted the Central Intelligence Agency, explaining the potential threat and asking for help in identifying him. "The C.I.A. wouldn't assist me," she says. "I was told by a C.I.A. agent that until you can prove he's European we can't help you."

Fisher tried to persuade Beverly and Bourdin to give blood samples for a DNA test. Both refused. "Beverly said, 'How dare you say he's not my son,'" Fisher recalls. In the middle of February, four months after Bourdin arrived in the United States, Fisher obtained warrants to force them to coöperate. "I go to her house to get a blood sample, and she lies on the floor and says she's not going to get up," Fisher says. "I said, 'Yes, you are.'"

"Beverly defended me," Bourdin says. "She did her best to stop them."

Along with their blood, Fisher obtained Bourdin's fingerprints, which she sent to the State Department to see if there was a match with Interpol.



Carey, worried about her supposed brother's self-mutilation and instability, was no longer willing to let him stay with her, and he went to live with Beverly in her apartment. By then, Bourdin claims, he looked at the family differently. His mind retraced a series of curious interactions: Beverly's cool greeting at the airport, Jason's delay in visiting him. He says that, although Carey and Bryan had seemed intent on believing that he was Nicholas—ignoring the obvious evidence—Beverly had treated him less like a son than like a "ghost." One time when he was staying with her, Bourdin alleges, she got drunk and screamed, "I know that God punished me by sending you to me. I don't know who the hell you are. Why the fuck are you doing this?" (Beverly does not remember such an incident but says, "He must have got me pissed off.")

On March 5, 1998, with the authorities closing in on Bourdin, Beverly called Parker and said she believed that Bourdin was an impostor. The next morning, Parker took him to a diner. "I raise my pants so he can see I'm not wearing a gun" in his ankle holster, Parker says. "I want him to relax."

They ordered hotcakes. After nearly five months of pretending to be Nicholas Barclay, Bourdin says, he was psychically frayed. According to Parker, when he told "Nicholas" that he had upset his "mother," the young man blurted out, "She's not my mother, and you know it."

"You gonna tell me who you are?"

"I'm Frédéric Bourdin and I'm wanted by Interpol."

After a few minutes, Parker went to the men's room and called Nancy Fisher with the news. She had just received the same information from Interpol. "We're trying to get a warrant right now," she told Parker. "Stall him."

Parker went back to the table and continued to talk to Bourdin. As Bourdin spoke about his itinerant life in Europe, Parker says, he felt some guilt for turning him in. Bourdin, who despises Parker and disputes the details of their conversation, accuses the detective of "pretending" to have solved the case; it was as if Parker had intruded into Bourdin's interior fiction and given himself a starring role. After about an hour, Parker drove Bourdin back to Beverly's apartment. As Parker was pulling away, Fisher and the authorities were already descending on him. He surrendered quietly. "I knew I was Frédéric Bourdin again," he says. Beverly reacted less calmly. She turned and yelled at Fisher, "What took you so long?"

In custody, Bourdin told a story that seemed as fanciful as his tale of being Nicholas Barclay. He alleged that Beverly and Jason may have been complicit in Nicholas's disappearance, and that they had known from the outset that Bourdin was lying. "I'm a good impostor, but I'm not that good," Bourdin told me.

Of course, the authorities could not rely on the account of a known pathological liar. "He tells ninety-nine lies and maybe the one hundredth is the truth, but you don't know," Fisher says. Yet the authorities had their own suspicions. Jack Stick, who was a federal prosecutor at the time and who later served a term in the Texas House of Representatives, was assigned Bourdin's case. He and Fisher wondered why Beverly had resisted attempts by the F.B.I. to investigate Bourdin's purported kidnapping and, later, to uncover his deception. They also questioned why she had not taken Bourdin back to live with her. According to Fisher, Carey told her that it was because it was "too upsetting" for Beverly, which, at least to Fisher and Stick, seemed strange. "You'd be so happy to have your child back," Fisher says. It was "another red flag."

Fisher and Stick took note of the disturbances in Beverly's house after Nicholas had vanished, and the police report stating that Beverly was screaming at Jason over Nicholas's disappearance. Then there was Jason's claim that he had witnessed Nicholas breaking into the house. No evidence could be found to back up this startling story, and Jason had made the claim at the time that the police had started "sniffing around," as Stick put it. He and Fisher suspected that the story was a ruse meant to reinforce the idea that Nicholas was a runaway.

Stick and Fisher began to edge toward a homicide investigation. "I wanted to know what had happened to that little kid," Stick recalls.

Stick and Fisher gathered more evidence suggesting that Beverly's home was prone to violence. They say that officials at Nicholas's school had expressed concern that Nicholas might be an abused child, owing to bruises on his body, and that just before he disappeared the officials had alerted child-protective services. And neighbors noted that Nicholas had sometimes hit Beverly.

One day, Fisher asked Beverly to take a polygraph. Carey recalls, "I said, 'Mom, do whatever they ask you to do. Go take the lie-detector test. You didn't kill Nicholas.' So she did."

While Beverly was taking the polygraph, Fisher watched the proceedings on a video monitor in a nearby room. The most important question was whether Beverly currently knew the whereabouts of Nicholas. She said no, twice. The polygraph examiner told Fisher that Beverly had seemingly answered truthfully. When Fisher expressed disbelief, the examiner said that if Beverly was lying, she had to be on drugs. After a while, the examiner administered the test again, at which point the effects of any possible narcotics, including methadone, might have worn off. This time, when the examiner asked if Beverly knew Nicholas's whereabouts, Fisher says, the machine went wild, indicating a lie. "She blew the instruments practically off the table," Fisher says. (False positives are not uncommon in polygraphs, and scientists dispute their basic reliability.)

According to Fisher, when the examiner told Beverly that she had failed the exam, and began pressing her with more questions, Beverly yelled, "I don't have to put up with this," then got up and ran out the door. "I catch her," Fisher recalls. "I say, 'Why are you running?' She is furious. She says, 'This is so typical of Nicholas. Look at the hell he's putting me through.'"

Fisher next wanted to interview Jason, but he resisted. When he finally agreed to meet her, several weeks after Bourdin had been arrested, Fisher says, she had to "pull words out of him." They spoke about the fact that he had not gone to see his alleged brother for nearly two months: "I said, 'Here's your brother, long gone, kidnapped, and aren't you eager to see him?' He said, 'Well, no.' I said, 'Did he look like your brother to you?' 'Well, I guess.'" Fisher found his responses grudging, and developed a "very strong suspicion that Jason had participated in the disappearance of his brother." Stick, too, believed that Jason either had been "involved in Nicholas's disappearance or had information that could tell us what had happened." Fisher even suspected that Beverly knew what had happened to Nicholas, and may have helped cover up the crime in order to protect Jason.

After the interview, Stick and Fisher say, Jason refused to speak to the authorities again without a lawyer or unless he was under arrest. But Parker, who as a private investigator was not bound by the same legal restrictions as Stick and Fisher, continued to press Jason. On one occasion, he accused him of murder. "I think you did it," Parker says he told him. "I don't think you meant to do it, but you did." In response, Parker says, "He just looked at me."

Several weeks after Fisher and Parker questioned Jason, Parker was driving through downtown San Antonio and saw Beverly on the sidewalk. He asked her if she wanted a ride. When she got in, she told him that Jason had died of an overdose of cocaine. Parker, who knew that Jason had been off drugs for more than a year, says that he asked if she thought he had taken his life on purpose. She said, "I don't know." Stick, Fisher, and Parker suspect that it was a suicide.

Since the loss of her sons, Beverly has stopped using drugs and moved out to Spring Branch, where she lives in a trailer, helping a woman care for her severely handicapped daughter. Recently, she agreed to talk with me about the authorities' suspicions. At first, Beverly said that I could drive out to meet her, but later she told me that the woman she worked for did not want visitors, so we spoke by phone. One of her vocal cords had recently become paralyzed, deepening her already low and gravelly voice. Parker, who had frequently chatted with her at the doughnut shop, had told me, "I don't know why I liked her, but I did. She had this thousand-yard stare. She looked like someone whose life had taken everything out of her."

Beverly answered my questions forthrightly. At the airport, she said, she had hung back because Bourdin "looked odd." She added, "If I went with my gut, I would have known right away." She admitted that she had taken drugs—"probably" heroin, methadone, and alcohol—before the polygraph exam. "When they accused me, I freaked out," she said. "I worked my ass off to raise my kids. Why would I do something to my kids?" She continued, "I'm not a violent person. They didn't talk to any of my friends or associates. . . . It was just a shot in the dark, to see if I'd admit something." She also said of herself, "I'm the world's worst liar. I can't lie worth crap."

I asked her if Jason had hurt Nicholas. She paused for a moment, then said that she didn't think so. She acknowledged that when Jason did cocaine he became "totally wacko—a completely different person—and it was scary." He even beat up his father once, she said. But she noted that Jason had not been a serious addict until after Nicholas disappeared. She agreed with the authorities on one point: she placed little credence in Jason's reported sighting of Nicholas after he disappeared. "Jason was having problems at that time," she said. "I just don't believe Nicholas came there."

As we spoke, I asked several times how she could have believed for nearly five months that a twenty-three-year-old Frenchman with dyed hair, brown eyes, and a European accent was her son. "We just kept making excuses—that he's different because of all this ugly stuff that had happened," she said. She and Carey wanted it to be him so badly. It was only after he came to live with her that she had doubts. "He just didn't act like my son," Beverly said. "I couldn't bond with him. I just didn't have that feeling. My heart went out for him, but not like a mother's would. The kid's a mess and it's sad, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

Beverly's experience, as incredible as it is, does have a precursor—an incident that has been described as one of "the strangest cases in the annals of police history." (It is the basis of a Clint Eastwood movie, "Changeling," which will be released this fall.) On March 10, 1928, a nine-year-old boy named Walter Collins disappeared in Los Angeles. Six months later, after a nationwide manhunt, a boy showed up claiming that he was Walter and insisting that he had been kidnapped. The police were certain that he was Walter, and a family friend testified that "things the boy said and did would convince anybody" that he was the missing child. When Walter's mother, Christine, went to retrieve her son, however, she did not think it was him. Although the authorities and friends persuaded her to take him home, she brought the boy back to a police station after a few days, insisting, "This is not my son." She later testified, "His teeth were different, his voice was different. . . . His ears were smaller." The authorities thought that she must be suffering emotional distress from her son's disappearance, and had her institutionalized in a psychiatric ward. Even then, she refused to budge. As she told a police captain, "One thing a mother ought to know was the identity of her child." Eight days later, she was released. Evidence soon emerged that her son was likely murdered by a serial killer, and the boy claiming to be her son confessed that he was an eleven-year-old runaway from Iowa who, in his words, thought that it was "fun to be somebody you aren't."

Speaking of the Bourdin case, Fisher said that one thing was certain: "Beverly had to know that wasn't her son."

After several months of investigation, Stick determined that there was no evidence to charge anyone with Nicholas's disappearance. There were no witnesses, no DNA. Authorities could not even say whether Nicholas was dead. Stick concluded that Jason's overdose had all but "precluded the possibility" that authorities could determine what had happened to Nicholas.

On September 9, 1998, Frédéric Bourdin stood in a San Antonio courtroom and pleaded guilty to perjury, and to obtaining and possessing false documents. This time, his claim that he was merely seeking love elicited outrage. Carey, who had a nervous breakdown after Bourdin was arrested, testified before his sentencing, saying, "He has lied, and lied, and lied again. And to this day he continues to lie. He bears no remorse." Stick denounced Bourdin as a "flesh-eating bacteria," and the judge compared what Bourdin had done—giving a family the hope that their lost child was alive and then shattering it—to murder.

The only person who seemed to have any sympathy for Bourdin was Beverly.

She said at the time, "I feel sorry for him. You know, we got to know him, and this kid has been through hell. He has a lot of nervous habits." She told me, "He did a lot of things that took a lot of guts, if you think about it."

The judge sentenced Bourdin to six years—more than three times what was recommended under the sentencing guidelines. Bourdin told the courtroom, "I apologize to all the people in my past, for what I have done. I wish, I wish that you believe me, but I know it's impossible." Whether he was in jail or not, he added, "I am a prisoner of myself."

"Yes, but it's *naturally* toxic."

When I last saw Bourdin, this spring, his life had undergone perhaps its most dramatic transformation. He had married a Frenchwoman, Isabelle, whom he had met two years earlier. In her late twenties, Isabelle was slim and pretty and soft-spoken. She was studying to be a lawyer. A victim of family abuse, she had seen Bourdin on television, describing his own abuse and his quest for love, and she had been so moved that she eventually tracked him down. "I told him what interests me in his life wasn't the way he bent the truth but why he did that and the things that he looked for," she said.

Bourdin says that when Isabelle first approached him he thought it must be a joke, but they met in Paris and gradually fell in love. He said that he had never been in a relationship before. "I've always been a wall," he said. "A cold wall." On August 8, 2007, after a year of courtship, they got married at the town hall of a village outside Pau.

Bourdin's mother says that Frédéric invited her and his grandfather to the ceremony, but they didn't go. "No one believed him," she says.

When I saw Isabelle, she was nearly eight months pregnant. Hoping to avoid public attention, she and Frédéric had relocated to Le Mans, and they had moved into a small one-bedroom apartment in an old stone building with wood floors and a window that overlooked a prison. "It reminds me of where I've been," Bourdin said. A box containing the pieces of a crib lay on the floor of the sparsely decorated living room. Bourdin's hair was now cropped, and he was dressed without flamboyance, in jeans and a sweatshirt. He told me that he had got a job in telemarketing. Given his skills at persuasion, he was unusually good at it. "Let's just say I'm a natural," he said.

Most of his family believes that all these changes are merely part of another role, one that will end disastrously for his wife and baby. "You can't just invent yourself as a father," his uncle Jean-Luc Drouart said. "You're not a dad for six days or six months. It is not a character—it is a reality." He added, "I fear for that child."

Bourdin's mother, Ghislaine, says that her son is a "liar and will never change."

After so many years of playing an impostor, Bourdin has left his family and many authorities with the conviction that this is who Frédéric Pierre Bourdin really is: he *is* a chameleon. Within months of being released from prison in the United States and deported to France, in October, 2003, Bourdin resumed playing a child. He even stole the identity of a fourteen-year-old missing French boy named Léo Balley, who had vanished almost eight years earlier, on a camping trip. This time, police did a DNA test that quickly revealed that Bourdin was lying. A psychiatrist who evaluated him concluded, "The prognosis seems more than worrying. . . . We are very pessimistic about modifying these personality traits." (Bourdin, while in prison in America, began reading psychology texts, and jotted down in his journal the following passage: "When confronted with his misconduct the psychopath has enough false sincerity and apparent remorse that he renews hope and trust among his accusers. However, after several repetitions, his convincing show is finally recognized for what it is—a show.")

Isabelle is sure that Bourdin "can change." She said, "I've seen him now for two years, and he is not that person."

At one point, Bourdin touched Isabelle's stomach. "My baby can have three arms and three legs," he said. "It doesn't matter. I don't need my child to be perfect. All I want is that this child feels love." He did not care what his family thought. "They are my shelter," he said of his wife and soon-to-be child. "No one can take that from me."

A month later, Bourdin called and told me that his wife had given birth. "It's a girl," he said. He and Isabelle had named her Athena, for the Greek goddess. "I'm really a father," he said.

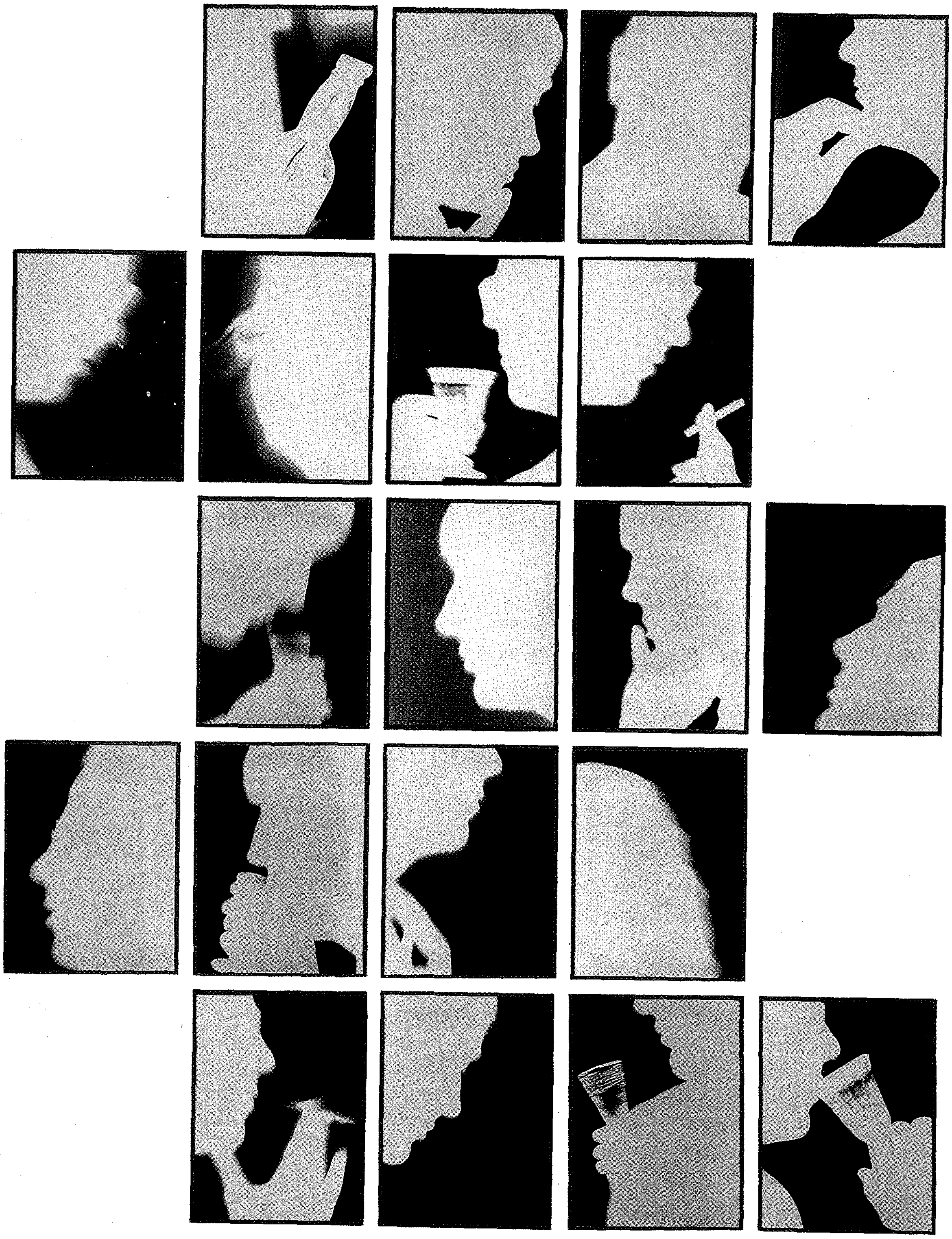
I asked if he had become a new person. For a moment, he fell silent. Then he said, "No, this is who I am." ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
David Grann talks about Frédéric Bourdin.

FICTION

THE DINNER PARTY

BY JOSHUA FERRIS



On occasion, the two women went to lunch and she came home offended by some pettiness. And he would say, "Why do this to yourself?" He wanted to keep her from being hurt. He also wanted his wife and her friend to drift apart so that he never had to sit through another dinner party with the friend and her husband. But after a few months the rift would inevitably heal and the friendship return to good standing. He couldn't blame her. They went back a long way and you get only so many old friends.

He leaped four hours ahead of himself. He ruminated on the evening in future retrospect and recalled every gesture, every word. He walked back to the kitchen and stood with a new drink in front of the fridge, out of the way. "I can't do it," he said.

"Can't do what?"

The balls were up in the air: water slowly coming to a boil on the stove, meat seasoned on a plate sitting on the butcher block. She stood beside the sink dicing an onion. Other vegetables waited their turn on the counter, bright and doomed. She stopped cutting long enough to lift her arm to her eyes in a tragic pose. Then she resumed, more tearfully. She wasn't drinking much of her wine.

"I can predict everything that will happen from the moment they arrive to the little kiss on the cheek goodbye and I just can't goddam do it."

"You could stick your tongue down her throat instead of the kiss goodbye," she offered casually as she continued to dice. She was game, his wife. She spoke to him in bad taste freely and he considered it one of her best qualities. "But then that would surprise her, I guess, not you."

"They come in," he said, "we take their coats. Everyone talks in a big hurry as if we didn't have four long hours ahead of us. We self-medicate with alcohol. A lot of things are discussed, different issues. Everyone laughs a lot, but later no one can say what exactly was so witty. Compliments on the food. A couple of monologues. Then they start to yawn, we start to yawn. They say, 'We should think about leaving, huh?,' and we politely look away, like they've just decided to take a *crap on the dinner table. Everyone stands,* one of us gets their coats, peppy goodbyes. We all say what a lovely evening, do it again soon, blah-blah-blah. And then they leave and we talk about them and they hit the streets and talk about us."

"What would make you happy?" she asked.

"A blow job."

"Let's wait until they get here for that," she said.

She slid her finger along the blade to free the clinging onion. He handed her her glass. "Drink your wine," he said. She took a sip. He left the kitchen.

He sat on the sofa and resumed reading an article. Then he got up and returned to the kitchen and poured himself a new drink.

"That's another thing," he said. "Their big surprise. Even their goddam surprises are predictable."

"You need to act surprised for their sake," she said.

"Wait for a little opening," he said, "a little silence, and then he'll say, he'll be very coy, he'll say, 'Why don't you tell them?' And she'll say, 'No, *you*,' and he'll say, 'No, *you*,' and then she'll say, 'O.K., O.K., I'll tell them.' And we'll take in the news like we're genuinely surprised—like, holy shit, can you believe she's knocked up, someone run down for a Lotto ticket, someone tell Veuve Clicquot, that bastard will want to know! And that's just the worst, how predictable our response to their so-called news will be."

"Well, O.K.," she said. "When that happens, why don't you suggest they have an abortion?"

He chewed his ice and nodded. "That would shake things up," he said, "wouldn't it?"

"Tell them we can do it right here with a little Veuve Clicquot and one of the bedroom hangers."

"Delightful," he said. "I'm in."

The kitchen was small. He would have done better to remain in one of the other rooms, but he wanted to be with her. She was sautéing the garlic and the onion.

"He's O.K.," he said. "They're both O.K. I'm just being a dick."

"We do this, what—at most, once or twice a year. I think you can handle it. And when they have the baby—"

"Oh, Christ."

"When they have the baby, we'll see even less of them."

"Holiday cards. Here's our little sun-chine. See our little sun-chine? Christ."

"You aren't the one who's going to have to go to the baby shower," she said.

"How much you wanna bet they buy a stroller?"

"A stroller?"

"A stroller."

"A stroller," she said. "To cart the baby around."

He put cheese on a cracker. "For to cart the baby around in, yes," he said.

"And you, if you had a baby, there'd be no stroller, right, because it would be oh so predictable? Absolutely no stroller?"

"I was thinking we could duct-tape the child," he said. "It would be cheaper."

"Like a BabyBjörn, but duct tape."

"Exactly."

"Would the baby face in or out?"

"If it was sleeping, in. Not sleeping, kind of kicking its feet, wanting to see the world, duct-tape it out, so it has a view."

"Allowing the child to be curious," she said. "Feeding its desire to marvel at this new experience called life."

"Something like that."

"The child must be so relieved that I'm barren," she said.

He left the kitchen. He stood in the living room with his drink, listening to the sounds of her cooking.

They should have invited Ben and Lauren, too, like last time. Ben and Lauren were more his friends. With Ben and Lauren there, time didn't move as it moved in hospital waiting rooms and the Midwestern churches of his youth. But she had wanted it just the four of them this time, probably so that they could more freely revel in their big news, and there was a limit to how many times he could say, unprompted, "Hey, should we invite Ben and Lauren?" At least he was doing Ben and Lauren a favor.

He returned to the kitchen. "When they come in," he said, "let's make them do a shot, both of them."

"A shot?"

"Of tequila."

"Her, too?"

"Both of them."

"To sort of . . . fortify the baby."

"We'll force them somehow," he said. "I'll figure it out."

"Better hurry," she said.

"All this talk of folic acid and prenatal vitamins. Give me a break. Do they think Attila the Hun got his daily dose of folic acid when he was in the womb? Napoleon?" She was going back and forth across the kitchen while he kept his drink close. "I could go on."

GILBERT & GEORGE, "THE SHADOW OF THE GLASS" (1972)/COURTESY LEHMANN MAUPIN GALLERY AND SONNABEND GALLERY

"George Washington," she said, "a Founding Father."

"See? I could go on. Moses."

"I don't think she's going to be willing to do a shot," she said.

"We trick her somehow. Tell her it's full of prenatal vitamins, and she shoots it down."

"Because she just graduated from the third grade," she said, "and she's blind and retarded."

"I'll think of something," he said.

He left the kitchen again. On his way back in, he said, "O.K., I've got it."

He found the room empty. Her wedding ring and the one with the diamond were on the counter, where she always put them before starting to cook anything. The sink had filled with dishes. On the stove, a big pot and a smaller one with a handle unfurled steam into the beige hood where the vent rattled. The door of the cabinet under the sink hung open. He checked the bathroom off the kitchen. He returned the way he'd come, through the apartment, in the unlikely event she had passed by without his noticing as he was sitting on the sofa. He returned to the kitchen, to the animated appliances and stewing ingredients. She came in through the front door.

"Where'd you go?"

"Took the garbage down," she said.

"I would have done that."

He had come up with a good approach to the evening, but he was no longer in the mood to present it. Instead, he went over to her at the stove. He threaded his arms around her waist as she stirred one of the pots. Years earlier, they'd had a name for this hug. He couldn't remember what it was. He kissed her neck, then the back of her hair. Her hair smelled of steam and shampoo and silk and wildflowers. "What can I do?" he said.

"You can set the table," she said.

He set the table. He stood in front of the refrigerator with a new drink. "So I've figured it out," he resumed. "They bring the bottle of wine, right? We thank them, we tuck it away in the kitchen. They never see it again. We start the evening. We don't ask them what they want to drink. Like it's just an oversight on our part. Because I know him. Even if she's not drinking because of the big news, he'll want a drink. I tell him we ran out. I tell him we'll open their wine at dinner. But then we don't. We just have water for the table. Then, in the middle of the meal—"

"You know, you should work for Al Qaeda," she said.

"—in the middle of the meal, I get up and go to the kitchen and I bring back a beer for myself. I open it at the table and take a long drink. What do you think?"

"Sounds promising."

"He says, 'Hey, got another one of those?,' and I'm, like, 'Oh, actually, this is the last one.' And then I kill it. Do you think they would leave?"

"Leave? No."

"Really? They wouldn't leave after that? Where the hell are they, anyway?"

"They might never come back, but no. They would not leave."

"You know, they're good people," he said. "Ultimately."

"She's my oldest friend," she said. "And he can be very funny."

"You're right, he can be very funny," he agreed.

Later, he came out of the bathroom just as the toilet was completing its roar. She was no longer in the kitchen. He took another cheese and cracker. He walked past the dressed table to the living room. She sat on the sofa reading the same magazine he had been reading. He stood in the middle of the room and raised his hands. "Where are they?"

"If there's one thing that's predictable," she said.

"But it's almost forty-five minutes."

"They'll be eating some very cold appetizers."

"Have you cooked the meat?"

"Everything but."

She casually flipped through the magazine. There was no outrage or impatience. She seemed resigned to waiting as long as it took.

"You should maybe call her," he said.

"Isn't this what you wanted?" she asked. "Something unpredictable?"

She was on the phone, calling hospitals. It was ten o'clock, and then it was ten-thirty. She had tried to reach them a dozen times. She'd sent texts and e-mails. They hadn't picked up and they hadn't replied.

"Not if it interfered with dinner," he said.

"Nice," she said. "Magnanimous and humane."

"Those fucking drips," he said, "have probably fallen asleep watching 'Friends' on DVD, for which they silence their phones and disable their BlackBerrys."

"Yes?" she said. She was speaking into the phone now. "O.K., thank you. Can you take my number just in case one of them comes in? Thank you." She left her name and number and hung up.

"Is it really possible," she said. She was dialling the next number. "Is it really possible that you care about no one but yourself?"

"I'm trying to be helpful."

"Your help isn't worth a good God damn anymore," she said.

He didn't like to be reminded. He left the room. "Sure," she said to the phone. "I love to hold."

"Is this meat going bad?" he called out. He was in the kitchen. He had finished the cheese and crackers, the mini Caprese salad she'd made with grape tomatoes, and the figs wrapped in bacon caramelized with a homemade glaze. Now he was sitting on a barstool eating a saucer of the mushroom risotto that was meant to go with the lamb, while staring at the meat on the butcher block. He had opened another bottle of wine. "Hey, babe, this meat? Should we do something with this meat?"

"Stick it up your ass," she said.

He stopped chewing. He looked with raised eyebrows at the two mustard-seasoned racks of lamb and thought how unpleasant it would be to insert one of their bony ribs into his butthole, but how much fun to walk out into the next room and moon her with a rack of lamb between his cheeks. "Stick it up my ass, huh," he said. "You know who should stick it up . . . whose asses . . . up whose asses it should be stuck up is, are your two friends of yours, their asses. They should stick it up their asses," he said.

Another hospital had no record, either, and again she left her name and number. She walked into the kitchen. "What are you muttering?"

"There are two racks there, one for each of their asses."

She put her fingertip on his forehead. "This isn't like them," she said, pushing his head back, "and you know it's not like them, and you're not being helpful." She released him, and he sprang back on the stool to an upright position.

"I'm sorry, am I supposed to be helpful?" he said. "Because I thought my help was no longer worth a good God damn."

She left the room.

"Wait," he said. He dropped the saucer to the counter and got off the stool. "Hold on." He followed her through the dining room. "Obviously, I'm not saying—will you listen to me please?—that I don't want to be helpful. Will you please turn around and listen?" She stopped and turned. "They just got their dates wrong, is all," he said, "and tomorrow, when they call, they'll tell you how sorry they are. They had to turn their phones off during the late showing of 'Kung Fu Panda' or something."

"So they went to see 'Kung Fu Panda' tonight," she said.

"Or something like it."

"And they turned their phones off so they wouldn't ring during 'Kung Fu Panda.' "

"Or," he said. "Or." He put his finger up. They were standing near the bedroom doorway. There was dim light coming from the dark room and he was suddenly irrationally afraid, as he had been as a child, that if anyone stepped inside, if she stepped inside, she would plummet to the center of the earth. He lowered his finger. "I'm sorry," he said. "I don't *think* they went to see 'Kung Fu Panda.' "

"You do not think, period," she said.

She stepped inside the bedroom. She did not plummet down but floated across the murk into the bathroom. She waited until the door was shut before switching on the light.

He sat on the kitchen floor for thirty minutes. Then he said, "Hey!" He got no response. He stood and went into the bedroom.

He found her in bed. She was in her pajamas. She was propped up against the headboard, flipping through another magazine in the light coming from the lamp on the nightstand. "What are you doing?"

"Going to bed."

"The meat is still on the counter," he said. "There's food everywhere. Are we just going to let it go to waste? And aren't you worried about your friends?" he asked.

"I'm not hungry," she said.

"Should you really be paging through a magazine right now?"

"What else would you suggest I do?"

"I don't know. Go over to their apartment? See if they're there?"

"I need to wait here in case I get a call from a hospital, or in case they show up."

He sat down on the bed. He put his head in his hands. He heard the glossy toss of one magazine page after another, and then, deeper in the ears, the squishy beat of his sobering heart.

"Well," he said, looking up. "Would you like me to go over there?"

"What are you going to do about it, big man? Man of steel? Gonna get inside the Absolutmobile and go find the big danger?"

He stared at her.

"It's too bad we can't have one," she said. "If it was ever abducted, what better daddy to save her?"

"Her? Is that right? Her?"

"I guess it would be important for you to have a boy, wouldn't it? So you could pass along all these accumulated masculinity skills. All your big-man powers."

He stood up from the bed.

"Do you want me to go over there or not?" he asked.

He had been to their apartment a handful of times, but tonight the lighting was much lower. It was a sizable apartment with a quirky floor plan and a proliferation of rooms that seemed to spool out one after another. He stepped inside the foyer and saw the first of the bedrooms pulsing with candlelight just beyond the entrance to the kitchen. He saw silhouettes of people there and more in the room to his right. People were coming and going from the kitchen, some louder than others. He did not recognize the man who had opened the door.

"Is there a party going on?" he asked.

"Are you a neighbor?"

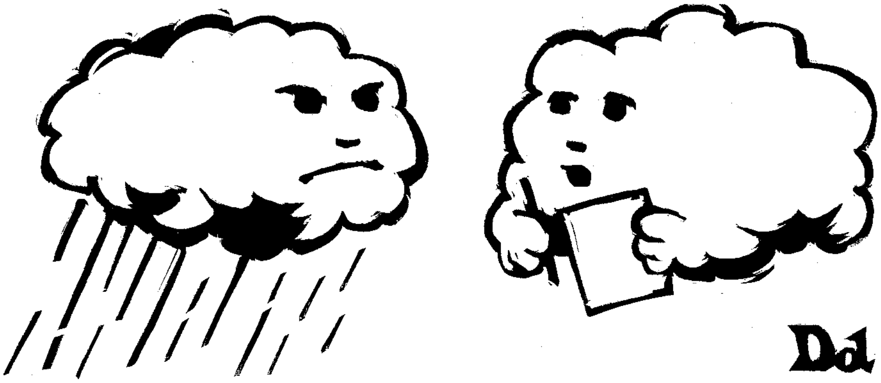
"No. An old friend."

"There's beer in the fridge," the man said. He closed the door and introduced himself. They shook hands and the man disappeared.

The noisy talk was crisper than it had been in the hall outside, where he had first noticed its underwater strains and thought it must be coming from some other apartment. He stayed in the foyer for a minute and then drifted down the small corridor to the kitchen. Here, too, the light was dim. Votives cast shadows against the chrome appliances and ceiling-mounted pots and pans and the people standing in twos and threes against the black marble counter. Someone reached into the fridge. The bright telescoping light broke the ambience and the door falling shut just as quickly restored it. "The last one of those, you bastard?" someone said. The one addressed mimicked smashing the bottle on the speaker's head. There was more mimicry of hand-to-hand combat as he drifted out of the kitchen.

He made his way through the rooms. He saw no one he recognized. It was hard to see in the low light, and some people, in the middle of conversations, had their backs to him. He did not want to go around tapping on shoulders or craning his neck conspicuously. He felt self-conscious despite the anonymity afforded by the darkness. He regretted not getting a drink while he was in the kitchen, not only because it had been a while since his last drink, and drinking was helpful in these situations, but because without a drink in hand he felt that much more out of place.

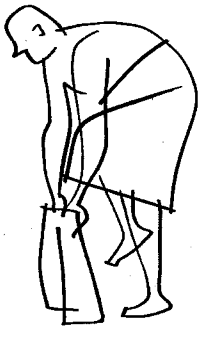
He ended up by the gas fireplace below the mantel and mirror. Solid blue flames licked over fake logs with bulky knots, radiating a dry and passionless heat. No smoke, no ash. Just a steady dull and decorous burn. He stared at it until his eyes began to hurt, letting the competing voices behind him blend into one festive gibbering blur. When he looked up again,



"I've learned to express my anger through my writing instead."

his eyes had hung a scrim of fire between him and the world. He could see only the vaguest shapes, the crudest outlines of people and walls, and then only at his periphery. He waited for the image to dissolve, but before it did completely a familiar voice said, "Well, look who it is."

He blinked to quicken his vision, which helped, but he didn't think it could be possible. "Ben?" he said.



"Lauren and I were just wondering where you could be," Ben said.

"We had plans," he found himself saying, "earlier in the evening."

"Where's Amy?"

"She's home," he said. He added, "Not feeling well."

"Oh, no," Ben said. "The flu?"

"Flulike," he said. "Where's Lauren?"

Ben turned around as if to locate Lauren. When he turned back, he spoke at a much lower register. "Listen, buddy, to your left, at ten o'clock? I'm going to pivot you, O.K.?" Ben reached out with his beer in hand and turned him a fraction. "Now she's at noon, right over my shoulder. See her? Do you know who that is?"

"She's beautiful."

"Beautiful? Buddy," he said, "do you have any idea who that woman is?"

"I don't know who any of these people are," he said.

Before he could study the woman any closer, he felt a hand on his arm. From the thinness of the grip he knew it to be a woman's hand, and when he turned he was not surprised. "Hey," he said. "You know we've been looking for you?"

"Stay right where you are, Ben," she said. "I'll get you another drink." She turned from Ben and addressed him. "Will you walk with me?"

With her hand now on the small of his back, she led him through the rooms faster than he had meandered through them on his own.

"What the hell's going on?" he asked her. "We've been looking for you all night and you're having a goddam party?"

"Hey, you promised to wait for me, now," she said to a group of people who turned to her all at once.

"Oh, I won't tell it without you," a man said, and someone laughed.

She turned back with a smile that quickly disappeared.

"Hey," he said. "Are you listening to me?"

"Can you please wait?" she asked, without looking at him.

"Where are we going?"

She returned him to the foyer. She finished what was left in her glass and placed it on the floor.

"Should you be drinking?"

"It's cranberry juice," she said. Then she opened the door and they stepped out into the hallway. She waited for the door to close behind her. "Who invited you to this party?" she asked.

"Who invited me?" he said. "No one invited me. We had dinner plans tonight, the four of us, and you stood us up."

"I'm sorry," she said. "We did not have dinner plans."

"I'm afraid, yes, we did," he said. "We made a huge spread for you guys and bought some very expensive meat and then I come here and find out you're having a big party."

"Now, why would we throw a big party if we had plans with you?"

"Why wouldn't we get an invitation if you were throwing a big party?" he asked.

She didn't have an answer. People considered her pretty, but she had puffy cheeks and a pouty mouth that had annoyed him from the beginning, almost against his will. He had wanted to like her at first, but her kind of mouth he associated with spoiled brats and her voice didn't help, nor the words she spoke. He felt sorry for that baby.

"Can't answer that, can you?" he said.

"Let me ask you something," she said. Her mouth, trembling a little, had never looked more punitive or ugly. "Why do you pretend to like us? Why do you invite us to dinner parties when everyone knows you don't like us, that you've been full of contempt for us from the very beginning?"

He was surprised by the forwardness of the question. He was tempted to argue the point. How could she know for certain that he didn't like them?

Instead, he said, "For Amy." She was silent. "Well, you asked," he said.

"This party is by invitation only," she said, "and we specifically did not invite you."

"So you don't invite me or Amy, your oldest friend Amy, but you invite my friend Ben?"

"We met Ben at one of your dinner parties."

"I know how you met him."

"And he and Lauren have since become friends."

"Who was that woman?" he asked.

"What woman?"

"The woman standing in front of me when I was talking to Ben."

"I must not be making myself very clear," she said.

"O.K., forget it," he said, "forget it. You don't want me here. That's fine. But I came because Amy was worried about you when you didn't show up for dinner. So what am I supposed to say to her when I go home knowing that you couldn't come to our dinner party because you have a big party going on yourself, and that you specifically didn't invite her?"

She stared at him. Her arms were folded and her head was a little cocked, as if they were having a lovers' quarrel, but her face was suddenly calm and expressionless.

"You want to know what I think of you?" she asked.

He was having a hard time reading her face. It was now so blank and flat and calm. He had no idea what she was thinking. It was as if she were a different person.

"I think Amy made a terrible mistake marrying you," she said. "I tried to tell her that, but I couldn't do it the way I should have. Amy and I have nothing, absolutely nothing in common anymore, and I'm sorry but I blame you for that, because it's so awful to have to see you and talk about you, and to think that she's going to be alone with you for the rest of her life just breaks my heart."

He began to walk away. He stopped and turned back. "You're barbarians," he said. "You and Scott both." He resumed walking.

"Don't come here again," she cried after him. "Don't call, either. Not tonight, and not tomorrow."

"I can't wait to go home and tell Amy. She's going to love this."

"I wish I could say I cared," she said.

He took a taxi home. In the back seat, he replayed the conversation again and again with such intensity that he began to shake his head and grit his teeth. He couldn't believe the things she had said to him. They were outrageous, offensive, and final. He hardly saw anything out the car window, but he could vividly picture her mouth and then the blank expression that had preceded her outburst, which worked him up even more.

When he stepped out of the cab, his anger had lessened through too much concentration on it. He wanted it to take hold of him again with its strangling grip, so he thought of the kitchen: every dish in the sink, the meat aging ruinously on the butcher block. He couldn't wait to see it again.

He walked through the front door and called out to her. He went through the apartment to the bedroom. The bed was unmade in that corner where she had lain flipping through her magazine, and the magazine itself was on the duvet. He looked in the bathroom before leaving the bedroom and walking back through the apartment, this time turning on all the overhead lights. On his way to the kitchen, he stopped at the closet and took an accounting of the coats, then he hurried on to the kitchen, where everything was as it had been a few hours earlier. He was that future self he had many times foretold but always dismissed as an impossibility. It was dizzying. He had to steady himself on the counter. He wanted nothing more than to tell her everything about the evening now. What cruel fun. What meagre compensation. Her wedding ring and the one with the diamond remained on the counter, where she had left them before she started cooking.

When he returned to the bedroom he found her on the far side of the bed with her back to him. His relief was immense. He crossed the room and saw in the light coming in through the blinds that her eyes were open. She didn't look at him, though she must have known he was there. He leaned against the wall. She continued to blink in a distant and lonely way.

"They were home," he said. He let that sink in. "They were home that whole time."

She closed her eyes. He prepared what he was going to say next. He wanted to go back now and start at the beginning, at the first sounds of the party he had picked up on in the hallway. With an economical and unsentimental gesture, she wiped a tear away before resettling her hand on her leg. He wasn't expecting her to cry.

He thought about how worried she had been. He thought about how much pride she took in her cooking and how much effort she had made for them.

He lay down beside her on the bed. "They were sleeping," he said. "I had to buzz them so many times just to wake them up. And she was so sorry. She said to me so many times how sorry she was."

She got out of bed and went into the other room. He was holding her one minute and the next he felt the enormity of the empty bed. He called out to her. She didn't respond. He called out to her a second time. He thought about getting up and going to her, but that was usually no longer helpful. He heard her rummaging through the closet. When she came back in, she switched on the overhead light just as he happened to be staring at it. His eyes burned and he turned away. The next thing he knew, she had placed a roller bag on the bed and was unzipping it.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

He couldn't believe what he was seeing. It was a totally predictable thing to do, to pack a bag, and yet completely outrageous. It was both dramatic and futile. Where did she plan to go?

"You're being ridiculous," he said. "Please stop. What does this have to do with me?"

She slowed down. She moved a few more things into the bag and then, with a gesture that was full of rage and yet halfhearted, she threw in a pair of socks. She seemed to recognize that what she was doing was preposterous, though nothing else appropriate or imaginable had come to her. She stood still in front of the bag. He got off the bed and took her in his arms.

"She just forgot," he said. "That's all. You know her."

She began to sob. She heaved into his shoulder as he held her. Hot tears came through his shirt.

"Why do I have this life?" she asked.

Her arms dropped to her side and she went limp. She cried as if he were not holding her, as if he were not in the room with her, as if he were not in the world at all. ♦

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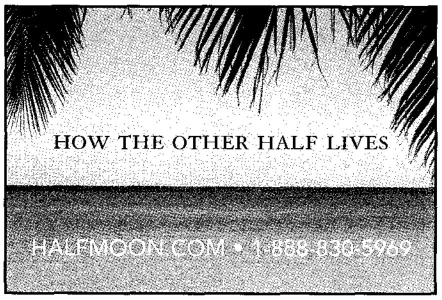

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THE CRITICS

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

Does the wrangling of interest groups corrupt politics—or constitute it?

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

In a year saturated with political conversation, can there be any topic that has not yet been discussed? Well, here's one: 2008 is the centenary of a curious and mesmerizing book that was long considered the most important study of politics and society ever produced by an American—"The Process of Government: A Study of Social Pressures," by Arthur Fisher Bentley. The reason its big anniversary hasn't been celebrated is that "The Process of Government" is an ex-classic, now sunk into obscurity. The reason it should be celebrated is not just that it deserved its former place in the canon but also that it is uncannily relevant to this Presidential election.

Arthur Bentley was the son of a Midwestern banker. He was born in 1870 in Freeport, Illinois, graduated from high school in Grand Island, Nebraska, and, after working briefly for his father, attended Johns Hopkins, which was then making itself into one of the first American research universities, on the German model. After graduation, he went to the University of Berlin and studied with Georg Simmel and other late-nineteenth-century giants of political theory. The work he did there became the basis for a Ph.D. from Hopkins.

Bentley took a lectureship at the University of Chicago, but, rather than pursuing the career for which he had formally prepared himself, he went to work as a newspaperman, mostly at the Chicago *Times-Herald.* Ten years or so into his newspaper days, Bentley began using his spare time to write "The Process of Government," a long, erudite theoretical work, tacitly buttressed by a newspaperman's intense familiarity with the day-to-day public life of a bumptious big city.

The University of Chicago Press brought out "The Process of Government" in 1908, to almost no notice. In 1911, Bentley quit Chicago and newspapering and moved to the small town of Paoli, Indiana, where he remained until his death, in 1957. He produced a series of increasingly abstruse books (sample title: "Linguistic Analysis of Mathematics"), and his renown grew steadily. His closest intellectual companion was John Dewey—a published collection of their correspondence runs to more than seven hundred pages—but Bentley's papers, at Indiana University, also contain letters sent to him over the years by, among many others, Albert Einstein, Thomas Mann, Sidney Hook, Estes Kefauver, and B. F. Skinner.

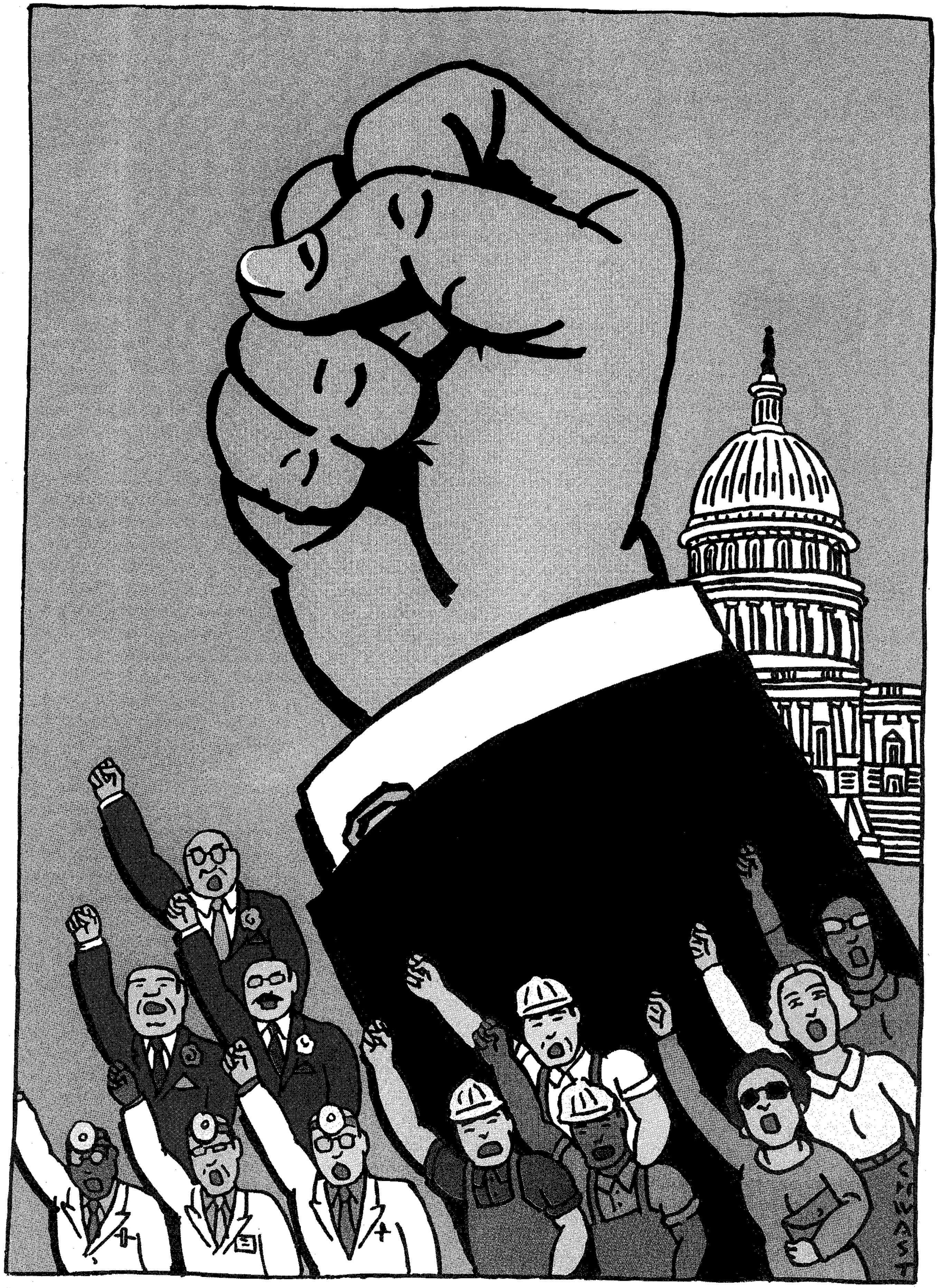
"The Process of Government" is a hedgehog of a book. Its point—relentlessly hammered home—can be stated quite simply: All politics and all government are the result of the activities of groups. Any other attempt to explain politics and government is doomed to failure. It was, in his day as in ours, a wildly contrarian position. Bentley was writing "The Process of Government" at the height of the Progressive Era, when educated, prosperous, high-minded people believed overwhelmingly in "reform" and "good government," and took interest groups to be the enemy of these goals. The more populist Progressives liked having the people as a whole decide things by direct vote; the more élitist Progressives wanted to give authority to experts. But Bentley, who seems to have shared the Progressives' goal of using government to curb the power of big business, rejected such procedural tenets. In Chicago terms, Bentley was the rare Progressive intellectual who believed, in effect, that the machine had a more accurate understanding of how politics worked—how it always and *necessarily* worked—than the lakefront liberals did.

Bentley's reputation soared in the years after the Second World War, and there's a reason. His presentation of politics as a never-ending, small-bore struggle for advantage among constantly shifting coalitions of interest groups, which appalled the Progressives, was appealing in the wake of Hitler and Stalin. Big ideas about the collective good had come to seem scary—the prelude to mass murder. Bentley spent the last years of his life being honored. Students of American politics read "The Process of Government" alongside Tocqueville and the Federalist Papers.

But pluralism—the name for Bentley's theory of politics—has always been good for starting an argument. The standard objections are that pluralism gives too little weight to the power of ideas and of social and economic forces, and that it leaves no room for morality. (Pluralism's equivalent in foreign relations is realism, which strikes people who don't like it as having the same flaws.) What if there actually is such a thing as a policy that's right on the merits? Shouldn't we find a way to make sure that it's enacted, instead of having to trust in the messy workings of the political marketplace? If politics worked the way Bentley thought it did, wouldn't the richer interest groups buy themselves disproportionate political power? To a lot of people, pluralism sounded like pessimism. It was during the nineteen-sixties, when reform was again in the air and impatience with traditional forms of politics was on the rise, that "The Process of Government" began to fall out of favor.

Bentley's insights are almost entirely missing from political discussion these

ABOVE: BENOÎT JACQUES; OPPOSITE: SEYMOUR CHWAST



Pundits like Thomas Frank deplore the role of interest-group lobbying, but aren't we all part of some interest group or other?

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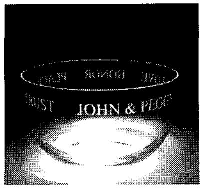

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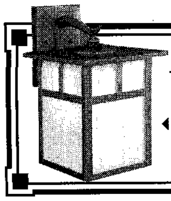

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days. Only in the realm of foreign policy is it permissible even to use the word "interests" in a positive way, and then they must be vital national interests. In domestic policy, interest groups (and particularly those in that ill-defined but malign category known as special-interest groups) are always the bad guys. So are their representatives in Washington, the lobbyists. We're inclined to think that the wheedling of interest groups—tree-hugging anti-free-traders, the Sugar Association, AIPAC—distorts politics. (For Bentley, the workings of interest groups—in interaction with one another—*constitute* politics.) When a politician speaks at an interest group's convention, we want to hear that he has somehow challenged or confronted the group, rather than "pandered" to it. Partisanship is bad, and "partisan bickering," which by Bentley's lights would count as a basic description of politics, is even worse. To an unusual extent, our Presidential candidates this year got where they are by presenting themselves as reformers, as champions of the transcendent public interest—as the enemies of Washington dealmaking-as-usual. For Bentley, there was no such thing as a transcendent public interest, and no politics that didn't involve dealmaking, disguised or not.

Closer attention to Bentley would help us understand why, as politicians succeed, they become more obviously attentive to interest groups, more obviously engaged in bargain and compromise. Hillary Clinton was this year's version of the pandering, old-politics candidate, a role that proved more appealing the longer the primary season went on. But when she was a new face in Washington, back in 1993, her identity was pretty much the opposite. Both John McCain and Barack Obama have disappointed some of their early, ardent supporters by modifying many of their positions to accommodate the established and organized interests of their parties. Much of the conversation about the Presidential election over the summer has been about how censorious we should be about their "flip-flops."

Indeed, these days we're inclined to think of interest groups as political interlopers, whose importance we hope to minimize, rather than as the entirety of politics. Party machines are supposedly moribund, and the organizational fabric of American society severely deteriorated. Politicians are forced to reach out to us as atomized individuals, via messages beamed into our heads through the media of mass communication, aren't they? Well, maybe not. Maybe Obama's and McCain's mutating behavior is evidence that Bentley was on to something.

The heart of "The Process of Government" is a series of dyspeptic rejections of other explanations of how politics works. If Bentley's strictures were applied today, just about everybody who makes a living explaining American politics (practitioners of what Bentley called "that particular form of activity which consists in the moving of the larynx or the pushing of a pencil") would be out of business. Under Bentley's rules, you can't talk about public opinion, because there is no such thing as "the public" (there are only groups) and opinions don't matter, only actions do. Abstractions like "the people" and "popular will" have no real content, either. "The public interest" is a useless concept, he says, because "there is nothing which is best literally for the whole people." You can't talk about a society as a whole having a collective soul, or about events being moved by the "spirit of the age" or the "Zeitgeist" or by feelings, individual or collective. You can't talk about race or other biological factors (Bentley was almost alone among Progressive Era intellectuals in dismissing eugenics as silly) or about national character: it doesn't matter what people are, it only matters what they do. You can talk about Presidents, parties, and other major political actors, but only if you understand them chiefly as mediums through which interest groups operate. Bentley took that pretty far: he wrote that the name of Theodore Roosevelt, who was President when "The Process of Government" was published, "does not mean to us, when we hear it, so much bone and blood, but a certain number of millions of American citizens tending in certain directions." You can't talk about morality as a force in politics, because such talk is almost always a cover for somebody's interest. You can't talk about progress, only about the waxing and waning of the power of different groups. You can't talk about ideals—especially the ideals of the Founders of the United States, who represented just another collection of interest groups—as affecting the course of events. Here's a typically sarcastic passage on that subject:

> Let the stump speaker appear at the old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration. What does he tell us? Our forefathers who created this nation were led by a great ideal of liberty. It was their highest good. Without it they would never have made this land what it is. Also they sought independence. Had they not suffered and labored many long hard years to breathe the air of freedom, they never would have been "free."... After which, speaker and hearers alike go back to the same old round of buying and selling, laboring and advantage-seeking. Did the speech change their methods of dealing with their fellows, privately or publicly? Did it move the country forward toward anything? Did the renewed assent of all its hearers to its principles have any such results?

For Bentley, every political force that matters is an interest group, regardless of whether it cops to the charge. States and cities are "locality groups," the legal system is a collection of "law groups," income categories are "wealth groups," devoted followers of a popular politician are "personality groups"; interest groups lie at the heart of monarchies and dictatorships as well as of democracies. "When the groups are adequately stated, everything is stated," Bentley declares. "When I say everything I mean everything."

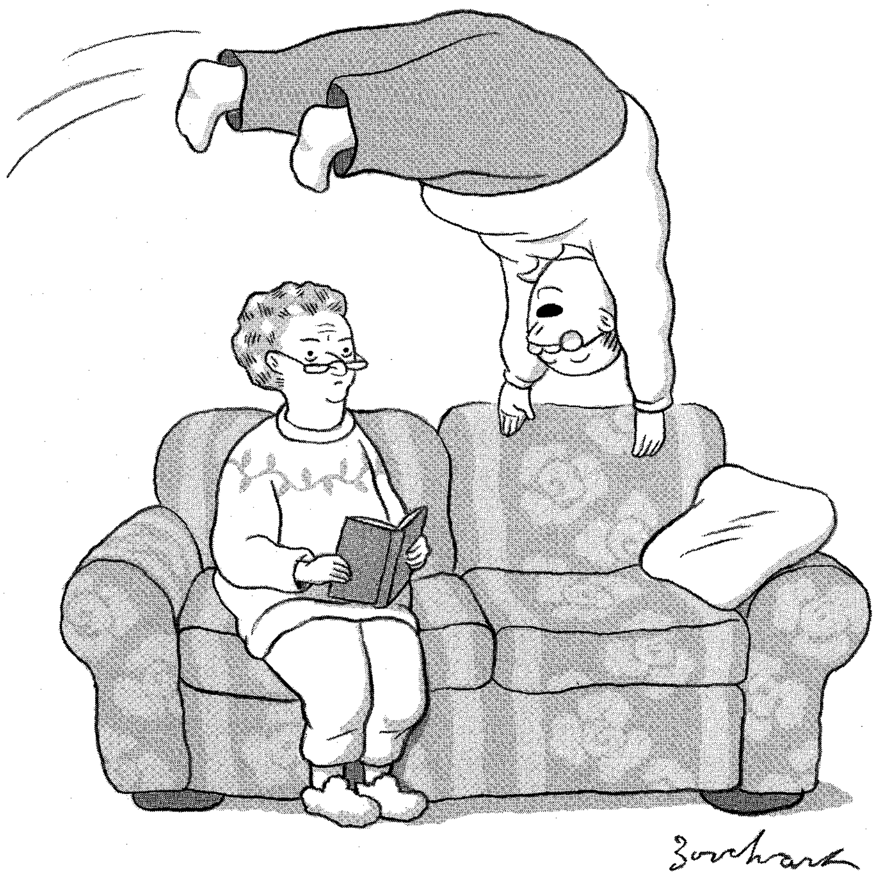
Bentley generally divides interest groups into two categories: organization groups (contemporary instances would include the American Association of Retired Persons, the National Association of Broadcasters, and the National Council of La Raza) and discussion, or "talk," groups. Discussion groups encompass all those who claim to represent the public interest or a good cause—journalists, reformers, activists, humanitarians, policy analysts—and, in Bentley's view, they matter far less than we think. He saw "an enormous overvaluation of the forms of activity which appear in words." Besides, anyone who comes into public life claiming not to have an interest is either deluded or deceitful.

At first, this all sounds shockingly cynical and depressing. We deeply want politics to have good guys and bad guys, good policies and bad policies. We want inviolable principles, like human rights, democracy, the rule of law, or carbon neutrality. Yet Bentley, who helped organize Robert La Follette's 1924 Progressive Party Presidential campaign in Indiana, didn't consider pluralism to be the stuff of defeatism; if anything, it was a call to action. People get involved in politics to get things that they want, which may or may not entail economic advantage. People matter politically only as members of groups, and groups matter only when they act, but political life is complicated: nobody is a member of only one interest group, and no interest group stands apart from other groups and behaves in a single, consistent way. Alliances are constantly shifting. No realm of government is immune to interest-group pressures, including the judiciary. (Liberals who, in the sixties and seventies, thought they could counteract the power of big business with institutions beholden only to the "public interest"—whether regulatory agencies or the courts—discovered that conservatives were capable of capturing any such apparatus.) The net result, according to Bentley, is this: "Intelligent actions, emotional actions, linked actions, trains of action, planned actions, plotted actions, scheming, experimenting, persisting, exhorting, compelling, mastering, struggling, co-operating—such activities by the thousand we find going on around us in populations among which we are placed."

If you spend any time in Washington, Bentley's account helps explain the nagging sense that the official conversation about American politics doesn't match the reality. Just about everything in politics that is too mundane to be part of that conversation operates, quite obviously, by the logic of pluralism—groups struggle against other groups and finally make deals, through politicians and agencies and courts—and, in the end, the higher-profile parts of politics inevitably fall prey to the tug of pluralism, too. That's why McCain and Obama have to keep explaining away their connections to lobbyists and why they have to keep recalibrating their positions on the big issues. Like Theodore Roosevelt, they may be reformers, but they stand at the head of armies of interest groups that they must tend to. A politician who says that he wants to run for high office so that he can clean up the mess in Washington and change the old way of doing things is, in Bentley's book, really saying that he'd like to adjust the correlation of forces among interest groups, bringing some into greater positions of power, and relegating others to lesser positions. To assert this is not necessarily to be despairing about politics. It merely means that if, for example, you want to understand Obama's remarkable rise, you will want to know less about his passion to get beyond partisanship and more about whom his campaign mobilized to come to all those state caucuses and to make all those Internet donations, and what those groups' political aspirations are. If that's being cynical, then it's cynical to try to understand the civil-rights era as having been propelled by a movement that African-Americans organized to make life better for themselves, rather than by a miraculous increase in the appeal of racial equality to the nation as a whole.

"The Process of Government" can be annoying—in its obsessive repetition of its main theme, in its lack of interest in empirical evidence—and yet it's one of those rare books which change the way you look at the world. Like a tune that you can't get out of your head, it's always playing in the background. Most of what is said and written about American politics, which stipulates that, although the politics we have may be awful, a radiant, transcendently good politics is a genuine possibility, becomes hard to take altogether seriously.

A case in point is "The Wrecking Crew: How Conservatives Rule," by Thomas Frank (Metropolitan; $25), the successor to "What's the Matter with Kansas?," which he published four years ago, to wide acclaim from liberals. In both books, Frank starts from the premise that if conservatives are in the saddle in Washington it must be the result of trickery or connivance, since people who aren't rich have no rational rea-



"Yes! Paul nails the Edna Vault!"

son to vote Republican. "What's the Matter with Kansas?" presented red-state voters as having been gulled into voting against their real economic interests by means of dubious cultural appeals. When Obama had to spend a couple of weeks last spring backing away from his explanation of why small-town Pennsylvanians weren't voting for him ("Bittergate"), it looked as if he'd got into trouble for channelling Thomas Frank.

"The Wrecking Crew" offers another account of conservatives' political power: they have built a mighty lobbying apparatus that has taken over Washington and disabled the normal workings of the federal government. Although Frank's timing could be better—his book dwells psychically in the heyday of Tom DeLay and Jack Abramoff, but they've fallen, the Democrats control both houses of Congress, and Washington is expecting a big liberal sweep in November—he has hold of something real. As Reaganism became the dominant strain in the Republican Party, a new group of politicians and operatives, many of them products of the legendarily rough-playing College Republicans (Abramoff, Lee Atwater, Karl Rove, Grover Norquist), adopted as their grand strategy the task of systematically disabling the Democratic Party's structures of support, so as to achieve a lasting Republican political order. This was no secret: they loved talking about it to anyone who would listen. Frank himself has spent time with Norquist, getting briefed on the plan over lunch at the Palm. The idea was that the Republicans would relentlessly peck away at unions and tort lawyers until the Democrats' ability to sustain themselves was irreparably harmed.

Frank regards this project as having been strikingly successful. Wherever he looks, he finds evidence of this, especially in the downtown corridors of Washington where lobbyists have their offices and in the Virginia suburbs where prosperous Republicans live.

Frank is a little like an anti-pornography crusader in his intense fascination with the thing that horrifies him—his Washington is full of mansions, fine wines, expensive suits, cigars, and wood panelling. Evoking the lobbyist as a type, he writes, "You can spot him in the field by his perfectly fitted thousand-dollar suits, usually blue; his strangely dainty shoes; his shirts, which often come in pink or blue with white collars and cuffs, the latter of which display cufflinks of the large and shiny variety; his vivid, shimmering ties, these days preferably in orange or lavender; his perfect haircut; his perfect tan; the tiny flag attesting to his perfect patriotism on his perfect lapel."

These are, in Frank's account, the objective correlatives of the underlying problem: because conservatives, for economic and ideological reasons, don't want government to work, they have arranged for it not to be able to work. A crippled government removes the best reason for people to vote for liberals, so the conservatives become ever stronger. As he puts it, conservatism "seems actively to want an inferior product." Frank's theory isn't undermined when Democrats win, because, in his view, they consort with many of the same conservative interest groups that Republicans do. Bill Clinton is a favorite negative example of Frank's, and no one should be surprised if Barack Obama soon becomes another.

Washington, as Frank sees it, plays host to a simple clash of interests: money and business on one side, the people on the other. "The Wrecking Crew" is written in a voice of high derision—much more so than the sincere, bewildered "What's the Matter with Kansas?"—and it can be good, spirited fun. Frank captures a quality of exuberant bullying in those of his conservative subjects he knows well enough to identify individually, rather than categorically. He registers their self-justifying certainty that the other side is playing as rough as they are, and the soaring rhetoric about evil and freedom that they use to discuss even trivial matters.

"The Wrecking Crew" is what Arthur Bentley would call a discussion-group activity, meant to fire up the troops. It is reportorially and intellectually imprecise. How many lobbyists are there in Washington, exactly? By what yardstick did Frank conclude that we are undergoing "the greatest wave of political corruption in living memory"? What would be the sign that conservatives no longer rule, if Democrats' controlling the political apparatus doesn't count? Frank rarely mentions Democratic lobbyists or interest groups and glosses over the complexity in the coalitions that form the two parties: "corporations" and "conservatives" seem always to operate in perfect concert, on the Republican side. "Lobbying brings a constant pressure in a single direction," he writes. An illustrative example is one that he offers in passing: "There was the two-day get-together between House Republicans and media company CEOs, after which the various broadcasters and publishers were asked to replace their Democratic lobbyists with Republicans; the Telecommunications Act of 1996, almost certainly written by industry lobbyists, followed soon afterward, deregulating the airwaves and trailing clouds of glorious profits for the media companies." You'd never guess from this that the Telecom Act pitted one group of telephone companies and their lobbyists against another group of telephone companies and their lobbyists—or that business-versus-business battles of this kind go on constantly in Washington.

Arthur Bentley, a man untroubled by insecurity, treated Karl Marx as a promising fellow in the few pages devoted to him in "The Process of Government"—at least Marx saw politics in terms of groups struggling against each other—but one whose work did not, in the end, live up to its potential. Marx insisted on excessively large, unitary groups, like the proletariat, and then, even worse, claimed that under an ideal form of government they would disappear. Frank, viewed from a pluralist point of view, has the same problem. He tends to characterize the Republicans and the Democrats as representing business and workers, period, rather than as ever-mutating coalitions of groups with differing motives—business mainly but not entirely on the Republican side, unions mainly but not entirely on the Democratic side, and many groups whose interests are not primarily economic divided between the two. Political issues, for him, usually boil down to labor-management disputes; government failures are the consequences of market ideology and the profit motive. The troubles of the American venture in Iraq, for example, are the result of "extreme privatization" and the attempt to create a "libertarian utopia." The horrifyingly slow pace of rescue and recovery in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina can also be ascribed to the Bush Administration's devotion to cronyism and privatization. Nor does Frank's analysis adequately explore the possibility that Republicans pay a political price when they fail to govern competently, even though that seems to explain the way elections have been going since 2006.

It's tempting to see Frank as a neo-Marxist, because he rarely misses an opportunity to bash capitalism. He writes, "Left unconstrained by other forces, the free-market system is one of the most restless, destructive arrangements ever contrived—tearing down and building up, obsoleting last year's fashions and praising this year's, driving up prices and bidding down wages, moving populations willy-nilly about the map, and scheming always to reduce the arts and sciences to sycophancy." Really, though, Frank is closer to being an old-fashioned mugwump-style Progressive. He believes that liberals, once in power, will not merely transfer economic resources from business to working people but will tend to the public interest, to good government. Underneath all the fun Frank has with lobbyists and their dainty shoes, the heart of his book is the idea that, just as conservatives actually want government to be corrupt and incompetent, liberals have an equally strong interest in making government work properly. By his lights, if you want bad government you should vote Republican, and if you want good government you should vote Democratic.

Yet even in a world without conservatives there would be no general agreement about how government should handle anything truly important. The Clinton Administration pushed through the North American Free Trade Agreement amid gusts of public-interest rhetoric—but Frank no doubt located the public interest on the other side. What about the much hated "earmarks" and "pork-barrel projects" that voters seem to want legislators to get for their dis-

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tricts—are they bad government, from the point of view of the folks back home? As Arthur Bentley pointed out, no political actor ever fails to argue that his interest is the public interest. Frank, who, at the end of "The Wrecking Crew," seems nostalgic for the great liberal historian Richard Hofstadter, would do well to reread Hofstadter's "The Age of Reform." Hofstadter persuasively portrays the anti-special-interest reformers of the Progressive Era as an interest group themselves, an educated and refined élite disadvantaged by the rise of industrial capitalism in the late nineteenth century. Frank, given to wistful and self-mocking riffs on how little he matters in Washington compared with the conservative operatives he meets at parties, can sound that way himself.

Just before the table of contents in "The Process of Government," on a page all alone, is the avowal "This book is an attempt to fashion a tool." A century later, the tool that Arthur Bentley was attempting to fashion retains its utility, and not merely for understanding the American political system. (Those who believed in 2003 that Iraqi politics was best understood as a struggle between democracy and dictatorship, rather than as a struggle among groups, could have learned from him.) Bentley may have pressed his arguments too far, but, given our tendency to dismiss interest groups as the serpents in the political Eden that the Founders created, "The Process of Government" serves as an indispensable corrective.

When the reputation of Bentley's masterpiece was at its peak, it was not just because he had fashioned a useful tool, of course; it was because many people saw pluralism as being not only accurate but attractive. To regain that perspective today requires an even greater undoing of deeply ingrained habits of thought. Pluralism, in the tradition of Bentley, requires that one see one's own political passions, and those of such unimpeachable actors as winners of the Nobel Peace Prize and members of the Concord Coalition, as representing something other than the promptings of pure justice. That does not come naturally. One has to see that sincere talk of the public interest and the general good can be dangerous tools in the hands of people one disagrees with, if not in one's own. (If you're a liberal, reread President Bush's second inaugural address, a grandiose exercise in public-interest rhetoric meant to lay the groundwork for waging the war on terror and privatizing Social Security.) One has to get over the habit of assuming that "interests," and, worse, lobbying and corruption, are the province only of one's political opponents, and not one's allies. Pluralism means dialling down the moral stature that we attach to universalist arguments, and dialling up the moral stature of particularism.

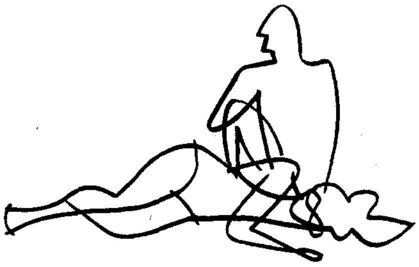
Still, the pluralist vision does admit an element of justice. In any political system that gives people the freedom to organize and vote—and even, historically, in many systems that don't—the logic of pluralism explains why those who do the hard, quotidian precinct work of politics will generally have more influence than those whose political participation is confined to writing, thinking, filing lawsuits, writing regulations, and spending money on media buys. In Bentley's scheme, that's all interest-group activity, but of the weaker "talk" (instead of the stronger "organization") variety. Throughout American history, political organizing has been the means that outsiders—immigrants, farmers, African-Americans in the Reconstruction South, and, more recently, netroots activists on the left and evangelicals on the right—use to gain advantage against the more talk-oriented élites, who regard their political aims as corruption or special pleading. On the last page of "The Wrecking Crew," Frank finally mentions what, from a pluralist perspective, would be the first order of business if you believe as passionately as he does that business-controlled conservative lobbyists are running Washington into the ground: organizing a political opposition. To be truly effective, though, such an opposition would have to muster its own army of Washington lobbyists. It's tempting to think that just over the horizon lies a procedural reform that will lead to the lasting triumph of what looks to you like good government. But the truth is that the only way to defeat one set of interests is with another set of interests. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Critical Inquiries

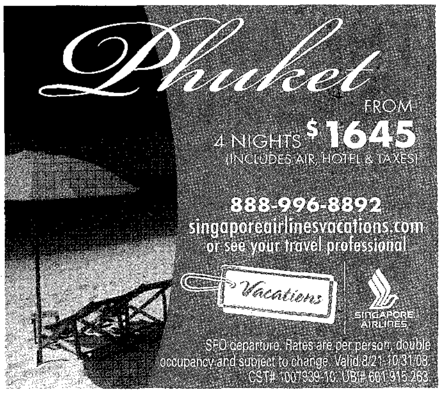
The Delighted States, *by Adam Thirlwell (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $30).* Ostensibly devoted to the problem of literary translation, this provocative treatise rambles through the Western canon from Cervantes to Bellow, treating novelists less as subjects than as characters in a sprawling intercontinental epic. Thirlwell revels in the anecdotal (Italo Svevo studied English with James Joyce) and the serendipitous (the French word *dada* was invented as an equivalent for "hobby-horse," in "Tristram Shandy"); presents indexes whose entries include "hamburgers" and "squiggles"; and lauds digression as the best means of capturing the "serious nothings" of life. While acknowledging the difficulty of conveying the "perpetual giggle" of Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin's name in any language other than Gogol's Russian, Thirlwell insists that translation is possible and, to that end, offers his own version of Nabokov's "Mademoiselle O," evoking the story's trilingual origins in fittingly verdant prose.

Balanchine Variations, *by Nancy Goldner (Florida; $24.95).* This book's essays on twenty Balanchine ballets are based on pre-performance lectures. That's bad—the essays are too short—and it's good, because, for the lay reader, they are perfect Friday-night previews of a Saturday matinée. But this is armchair reading, too. With each ballet, Goldner addresses a different facet of Balanchine's work: abstraction ("Concerto Barocco"), economy ("Valse Fantaisie"), tension ("Agon"), classical technique ("Ballo della Regina"), pacing ("Theme and Variations"), dreamwork ("A Midsummer Night's Dream"). In every case, she draws on her long experience, her great common sense—this is the least churchy book ever published on Balanchine—and, rarest of all, her ability to relate choreography to heart and soul without sounding gaseous. The book is modest and, at the same time, utterly self-assured. Anyone who cares about Balanchine should buy it immediately.



Spiral Jetta, *by Erin Hogan (Chicago; $20).* Facing a midlife crisis of sorts, Hogan, a "recovering art historian," took a three-week trek in search of the American Sublime. Her destinations were "monuments of American land art," including Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty," a coil of earth and rock built in the Great Salt Lake in 1970. Short on personal information—we never learn much about Hogan, or about Todd, her eventual companion—this travel memoir nonetheless offers a soft lens on some hard ideas. Standing in Walter De Maria's "Lightning Field," in the high desert, amid four hundred stainless-steel poles, Hogan ruminates on how the work affects our sense of time, space, size, and scale. She is at her best when she reëxamines the precepts of modernism in the changing light of New Mexico, and shows how the human body is meant to be a participant in these grand constructions.

Callas Kissed Me . . . Lenny Too!, *by John Gruen (PowerHouse; $29.95).* John Gruen, a Jewish refugee from Europe and former G.I., came to New York in 1949 looking for a way to achieve "some sort of stardom." This entertaining memoir, strewn with exclamation points, recounts his search, as he flings himself at famous and influential people to further his careers as a bookstore clerk, a song composer, a publicist, a photographers' agent, and, finally, a respected music and dance critic. Gruen's score settling can seem fantastically petty, and, despite his protests, his relationships with some of his erstwhile subjects—especially Leonard Bernstein and Rudolf Nureyev—verge on sycophancy. What makes the book appealing is the author's hearty candor and his numerous photographs, casual yet suggestive, of the musicians, artists, and dancers who made New York the center of the postwar cultural universe.



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ON TELEVISION

USA TODAY

The network's newest misfits.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

USA has distinguished itself in recent years as the oddball network—home of the misfits and safe haven for the dysfunctional. And that's not just the viewers. The network's slogan is "Characters welcome," as in "That guy's a real character." The best illustration of the slogan is "Monk"—the series itself, which is now in its seventh season, and the character Adrian Monk, a sad, annoying, touching, and inadvertently funny obsessive-compulsive former police detective, still played beautifully after all these years by Tony Shalhoub. The stable grew two years ago with "Psych," last summer with "Burn Notice," and this summer with "In Plain Sight." (USA also shows episodes of the Fox series "House," and an ugly homegrown thing called "Dr. Steve-O," one of those shows starring an incorrigible jackass—in this case, a guy named Steve-O, who is an actual alumnus of MTV's "Jackass"—and involving people who dunk their heads in a tub of fish guts and do handstands on broken glass.)

Both "Burn Notice" and "In Plain Sight" have elements of crime, mystery, and detective work, and, in keeping with USA's mission, attitudinous, attention-demanding main characters. Both have also done well in the ratings. "In Plain Sight," whose season ends August 17th, has been renewed, and undoubtedly "Burn Notice" will be, too. In "Burn Notice," Jeffrey Donovan stars as Michael Westen, a suddenly former spy—"burn notice" is the term used in spy circles when an agent is terminated. Westen has been burned for reasons he doesn't know; one moment he's in a market in Nigeria, and the next he's being packed onto a plane and sent off to a place not of his choosing, which happens to be Miami, where his mother, Madeline (Sharon Gless), lives. But he's not out of danger—his own people, whoever they are (we're never told which government agency Westen was connected with, or even if he was formally connected with one at all), may be after him, and so may the people he was after. Miami, with its heat, intrigue, flow of shady capital, and fabled glamour, is a good spot for "Burn Notice"; it's both Hollywood and Casablanca. (The show's creator, Matt Nix, originally set it in Newark but was, shall we say, gently persuaded by USA to move it to Miami.)

While Westen is trying to figure out who burned him, and how he can regain his job, he lends a helping hand to his mother's friends, and to other locals who have found themselves on the wrong side of thugs, assassins, and blackmailers. At the same time, he has to protect his mother, who, by virtue of being related to him, is always a potential target for no-goodniks. Michael has a complicated relationship with his mother, who is a less blowsy and flamboyant version of the mother Gless played in "Queer as Folk," combined with some of Mama Rose's will. She's pushy, she chain-smokes, and she wears the kind of big, colorful earrings that say "Florida retiree with pizzazz." Michael resents her for not having been the best mother and for having turned a blind eye to his father's failings—his father was an irresponsible, absent type, and it's clear that that neglect has something to do with Michael's escape into another life. Upon his return to Miami, his mother says, "You missed your father's funeral. By eight years." Michael's ambivalence toward his mother is already getting old, partly because his character is not deepening as the series goes on. Donovan has a hard, closed face, and he deploys a broad, deliberately insincere grin that conveys Westen's bitterness and cynicism, but not much else. It is not a terrible thing that Donovan strongly resembles the actor James Franco, but it is unfortunate that his steely glint, his wiry frame, and his often inappropriate smile call up Frank Gorshin's Riddler in the old "Batman" series.

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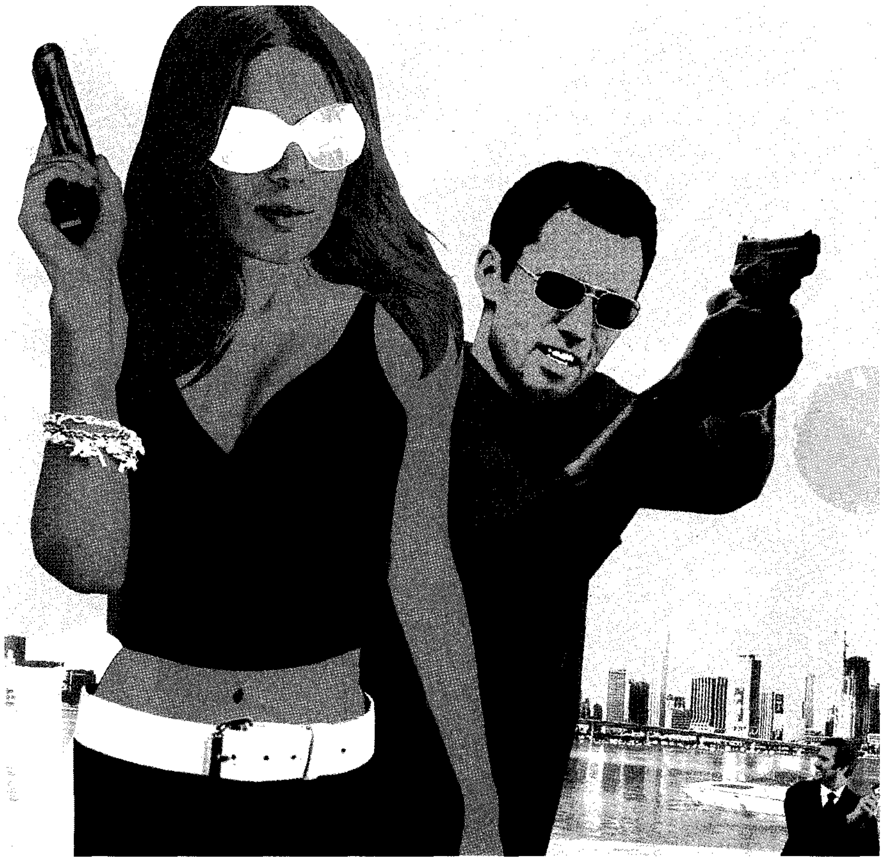
What little emotional life Michael has is with a weapons expert, Fiona Glenanne (Gabrielle Anwar), who works with him and is a sometime flame; but if there's lingering feeling between them in the script, it's not on the screen. Fiona's value is comic; she's a pretty Irish lass, who happens to be turned on by violence, and who gets pouty when she has to hold her fire. The best character in "Burn Notice" is an old colleague of Westen's, Sam Axe (Bruce Campbell), who left the world of espionage for the girls, the bars, and the ease of Miami; he's a happy bachelor, if slightly harried by his (offscreen, and funnier for it) girlfriend, and despite the fact that he has been secretly reporting to government agents on his old pal Michael and is a little torn about that. Campbell, a square-jawed, solidly built, handsome actor with a resonant, announcer's voice, became famous in the eighties for his appearances in the "Evil Dead" movies (he wrote a book called "If Chins Could Kill: Confessions of a B Movie Actor"). His suburban-dad looks have given way to a warm, scruffy bearishness, and he ambles through "Burn Notice" as if he were having the time of his life.


Miami vice: Gabrielle Anwar, Jeffrey Donovan, and Bruce Campbell in "Burn Notice."

JOHN RITTER

"In Plain Sight" has a different problem—a compelling lead with a co-star who's more muffler than foil. Mary McCormack plays Mary Shannon, a federal marshal in Albuquerque who works with WITSEC, the witness-protection program, helping to shepherd people into the program and get them settled, and, of course, protect them from the people who are looking for them and sometimes from themselves as well. She's in her mid-thirties, and is defensive, difficult to deal with, not very sympathetic, and in fact very appealing; even better, she hasn't been saddled with quirks the way some other strong women on TV have been lately—she's just a real pain. (She has been saddled, like Michael Westen, with a meddling, uncontrollable mother, supplied here by Lesley Ann Warren.) Her partner, Marshall Mann, is played by Frederick Weller, a physically imposing actor, except for two things—he has an unexpressive, blurry face, and when he speaks he barely opens his mouth. Marshall and Mary also have some chemistry written into their roles, but the spark just isn't there. David Maples, who created the series and wrote a third of the first season's episodes, has put the bad in badinage by forcing them to spit out one exhaustingly sardonic line after another. Actually, watchable as McCormack is here, she doesn't really click with any of the other actors in the show. I won't be surprised if next season some of them receive burn notices.

Even if you're not usually interested in distinctions between different kinds of stupid, I submit that in this not entirely pleasant year (see index under "political primaries") there's a little room for some good stupid. While watching the ABC competition show "Wipeout" when it premièred six weeks ago, I became at moments a truly happy idiot, and I could hear my brain cells, one after another, packing their suitcases and walking out of my head, saying regretfully but firmly, "I'm sorry, I just can't live here anymore." Well, fine. Go, then. Still, it's not as though I'm addicted to stupidity, so after a couple of episodes I forgot about "Wipeout" and moved on to Bill Moyers. Then, scanning last week's onscreen TV schedule, I was stopped by the description of "Wipeout" and was pulled back in: "Obstacles include Foamy Launch Pads and Killer Surf." That's all I needed to hear. The competition in "Wipeout" mostly takes place in a giant pool, where contestants—big ones, small ones, fat ones, skinny ones, with each body type fair game for the hosts' jokes—try to move forward by walking over wobbly blocks, bouncing on giant red rubber balls anchored in the water, walking on a ledge next to a wall that has automated boxing gloves punching out of it, and jumping onto a sloped moving disk studded with bollards. No one can avoid looking ridiculous—everyone bounces off the big red balls and falls into the water, and virtually everyone gets punched off the ledge into a mud bath. The big-ball challenge (the three hosts relish the many opportunities they have to say the words "big balls") was the one that made me laugh over and over again. The cartoonish airborne parade of bodies—sprawling, splayed, sliding in their attempt to accomplish the implausible—seemed like a perfect punch line to the human comedy. You'd have to be a fool not to appreciate that kind of stupidity. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

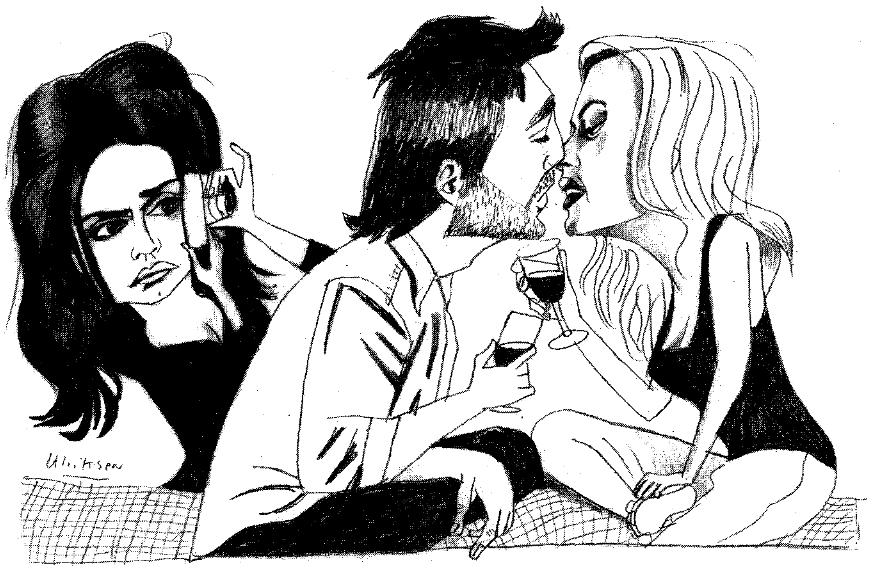
YOUNG LOVES

"Vicky Cristina Barcelona" and "Elegy."

BY DAVID DENBY

Woody Allen's "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" has a natural, flowing vitality to it, a sun-drenched splendor that never falters. Two young American women go to Barcelona for the summer—Vicky (Rebecca Hall), who is bright, skeptical, and cautious, and Cristina (Scarlett Johansson), more adventurous than her friend but unformed and easily dissatisfied, a seeker without a lodestar. In the magnificent city, they meet Juan Antonio (Javier Bardem), who is incapable of spending a night alone. Bardem's natural-born lover—a painter, by trade—is as devastating as his natural-born killer in "No Country for Old Men." He's almost criminally attractive—soft-spoken and erudite, decent in his way but relentless, a Don Juan brought back to life as an English-speaking charmer. Both women get involved with him, and the movie becomes a complicated triangle that forms, breaks apart, and re-forms; it's also a lengthy exploration of the eternal struggle between security and passion, dependency and anarchic freedom. Allen can be literal-minded about his thematic polarities, but, in this movie, he has put actors with first-class temperament on the screen, and his writing is both crisp and ambivalent: he works everything out with a stringent thoroughness that still allows room for surprise. And, through all the twists and turns, the ochre beauty of Barcelona (as photographed by Javier Aguirresarobe) plays a major role. The characters make maybe one or two more touristic stops than is necessary, but it's a minor flaw. You can feel Allen's excitement in the sensual atmosphere. Spain! A seventy-two-year-old man has warmed his bones.

Allen uses a narrator (Christopher Evan Welch) to explain who the women are, and, at first, it seems as if the director is just filling in backstory and telling us things we might have noticed ourselves. But this narrator does for Allen what narrators once did for Truffaut—he allows him to skip merely functional exposition and jump from highlight to highlight. Cristina first eyes Juan Antonio in an art gallery. Later, she is sitting with Vicky in a restaurant, and the artist, dining in the same place, comes over and suggests, with virtually no preliminaries, that the three fly to a small city not far from Barcelona for a weekend of sex. "Life is short, dull, full of pain," he says. Why not seize any opportunity for pleasure? He's provocatively teasing the Americans, but he's neither a cynic nor a user. He gives good value; that's why he's a heartbreaker. Vicky, who appears to be composed of nothing but common sense, falls in love after one night, and realizes that her fiancé, a New York corporate lawyer whose horizons don't expand beyond business, golf, and a nice house in Westchester, will never excite her in the same way. But Cristina is the one better suited for Juan Antonio, and she enters into a prolonged affair.



Penélope Cruz, Javier Bardem, and Scarlett Johansson in Woody Allen's new movie.

MARK ULRIKSEN

The way the women play against Bardem is fascinating. Rebecca Hall, a twenty-six-year-old English actress from a theatrical family (her father is the director Peter Hall), is tall, with a long face and a wide smile—she can look radiant one minute and neurotic, tense, and gloomy the next, as if she were channelling Allen's stumbling anxieties (a common reaction in actors working with him for the first time). With Bardem, Hall goes back and forth between desire and panic, and she's touching as none of Allen's other female characters have been recently. Scarlett Johansson, who is still only twenty-three, has appeared in an amazing number of movies. There's no mystery why: she's charming and also pliant and openly sexual in a way that obviously pleases male directors. She's at a stage in which her sensuality is more developed than anything else in her personality, but that configuration works for her this time. Going to bed with an attractive man is not going to tell Cristina all that she needs to know about herself. Allen has successfully captured a spirit of restless indeterminacy. Does Cristina have any artistic gifts? Before the summer is over, she begins to stir.

The movie is largely set among artists, in a kind of restaurant-and-studio bohemia (still a possible way of life in Barcelona, perhaps). What happens in this world when you have more promise than you can fulfill is made evident, with tragicomic results, by the figure of Juan Antonio's former wife, Maria Elena (Penélope Cruz), who is highly intelligent and talented but so tempestuous that she creates havoc wherever she goes. (She's like a Frida Kahlo without the discipline to work.) The American women yearn for something more than bourgeois stability, yet Allen means for us to understand that a life of passion alone can lead to craziness. Maria Elena is an enactor of her own unhappiness; she makes accusations, steps across sexual boundaries, pulls out knives and guns. Cruz has never done anything like this: with her downturned mouth and wild black hair, she looks witchy and unbeautiful. For Vicky and Cristina, the divorced couple are a vision of Heaven and Hell at the same time. Juan Antonio and Maria Elena can't get along, but their rebarbative effect on each other produces some good paintings. Is the art that emerges worth all the mess? The answer Allen offers is a tentative yes. One is meant to emerge from "Vicky Cristina Barcelona" believing that happiness may be elusive, even impossible, but that life has a richness greater than one's personal satisfaction. There's something stronger in the air—a largeness of spirit, as well as abundant physical beauty. The characters may suffer, but the filmmaker exults.

Academic fictions used to be funny (think of novels by Kingsley Amis, Randall Jarrell, David Lodge). A professor gives himself over to some lofty and exacting pursuit, and yet his life, like everyone else's, is marked by squabbles, misdemeanors, accidents, and sexual torment, and that discrepancy is ready-made for irony and pratfalls. But now, in the movies at least, the banana peels have been swept away, and the academic setting has yielded one melancholy tale after another. Intellectual passions have hardened (in many cases) into arid rectitude; autumnal emotions such as sarcastic rage dominate the dinner table; and, in the future, the terminating scythe awaits. The positive side of the shift is that these roles bring out the toughness of aging hides. Of all the good actors who have adorned the middle-aged-professor films, including Michael Douglas ("The Wonder Boys"), Anthony Hopkins ("The Human Stain"), Jeff Daniels ("The Squid and the Whale"), Frank Langella ("Starting Out in the Evening"), Philip Seymour Hoffman ("The Savages"), Dennis Quaid ("Smart People"), and Richard Jenkins ("The Visitors"), Ben Kingsley, in "Elegy," based on Philip Roth's 2001 novel "The Dying Animal," is the most formidable and convincing. Kingsley's David Kepesh is a literature professor at Columbia and a regular virtuoso performer on public television and NPR. Kingsley brings to this role an uncanny stillness and concentration; he hesitates an instant before he speaks, and then jumps ahead to the next place in David's thought. Unlike some of the earlier professor heroes, he's never obvious, pedantic, or dry. Nicholas Meyer did the adaptation, and he gets some of the Rothian tone—the impatience, the sharpness, the full-bore egotism that modulates into rueful self-recognition. Kingsley, who is sixty-four, has the grizzled barrel chest of an aging sexual warrior, a strong nose, and a shaved head. He's shrewd enough to make David not a monster but a plausibly selfish man, a man who has narrowed life down to his own needs and pleasures. He will not be imposed upon.

At the end of the semester, he seduces a graduate student, Consuela (Penélope Cruz, again), who's meant to be in her late twenties (Cruz is actually thirty-four). In the book, Consuela is only twenty-four, so the scandalous element has been lessened, though the David of the movie still feels it—the difference in years is part of the excitement of the affair for him. An upper-middle-class woman of Cuban descent, slightly formal in her manner, Consuela wants an opening to culture, the touch of an experienced man. David wants a final mad immersion in lust, which arrives, not to his surprise, with its attendant idiocies of jealousy and possessiveness. The Roth novel, written in the first person, has a rushing intensity, but the movie, which observes the characters from outside (with some voice-over narration from David), is calmer and quieter. The Spanish director Isabel Coixet works with candor, directness, and simplicity. She isn't afraid of lengthy scenes of the two actors just talking to each other, mixed with lavish but respectful attention to Cruz's body, especially her bare chest, which is treated as one of the wonders of all creation.

We're in fast company here, and the experience is refreshing. The interludes with David's friends—including a smart businesswoman who is his longtime occasional lover (Patricia Clarkson) and a teasingly affectionate and possibly envious New York poet (Dennis Hopper)—are written and played with real bite, and David's relationship with his resentful grownup son (Peter Sarsgaard) is an angry contest of hurt feelings that turns, at last, into wary respect. As much as David would prefer that everything remain the same, mortality and ill fortune abruptly enter his life. The banana peels have been replaced with something like inevitability. As in most of these films, the proud man, getting older, moves away from isolation—a little. That's as close to an emotional surge as these morose movies can achieve, but, in the hands of a great actor, it's enough. ♦

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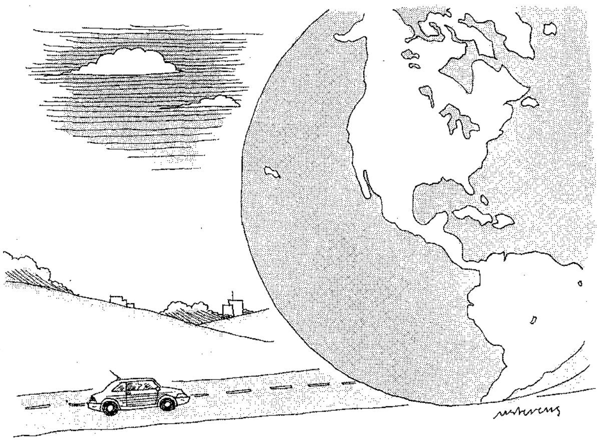
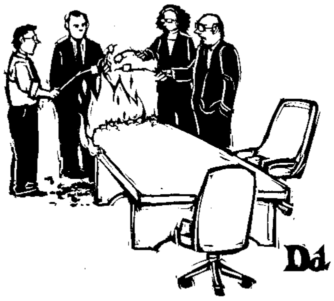
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Leo Cullum, must be received by Sunday, August 17th. Finalists in the July 28th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the September 1st issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Honey, I told you the whole world is headed to the Cape this weekend."
Terri-Lee Burger, Brooklyn, N.Y.



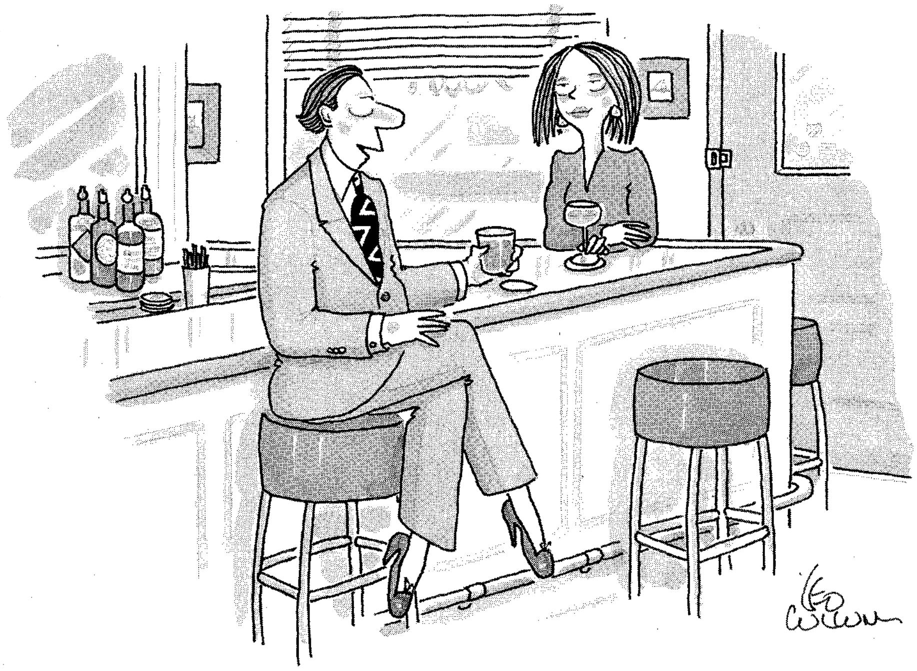
THE FINALISTS

"The first rule of s'mores club is you do not talk about s'mores club."
Jason Melancon, New Orleans, La.

"Next, Jenkins, I expect a ghost story. On my desk at 3 P.M. *sharp."*
Audrey Bartus, Naperville, Ill.

"I think we got some really good ideas from bring-your-child-to-work day."
Geoffrey Holm, Bellevue, Wash.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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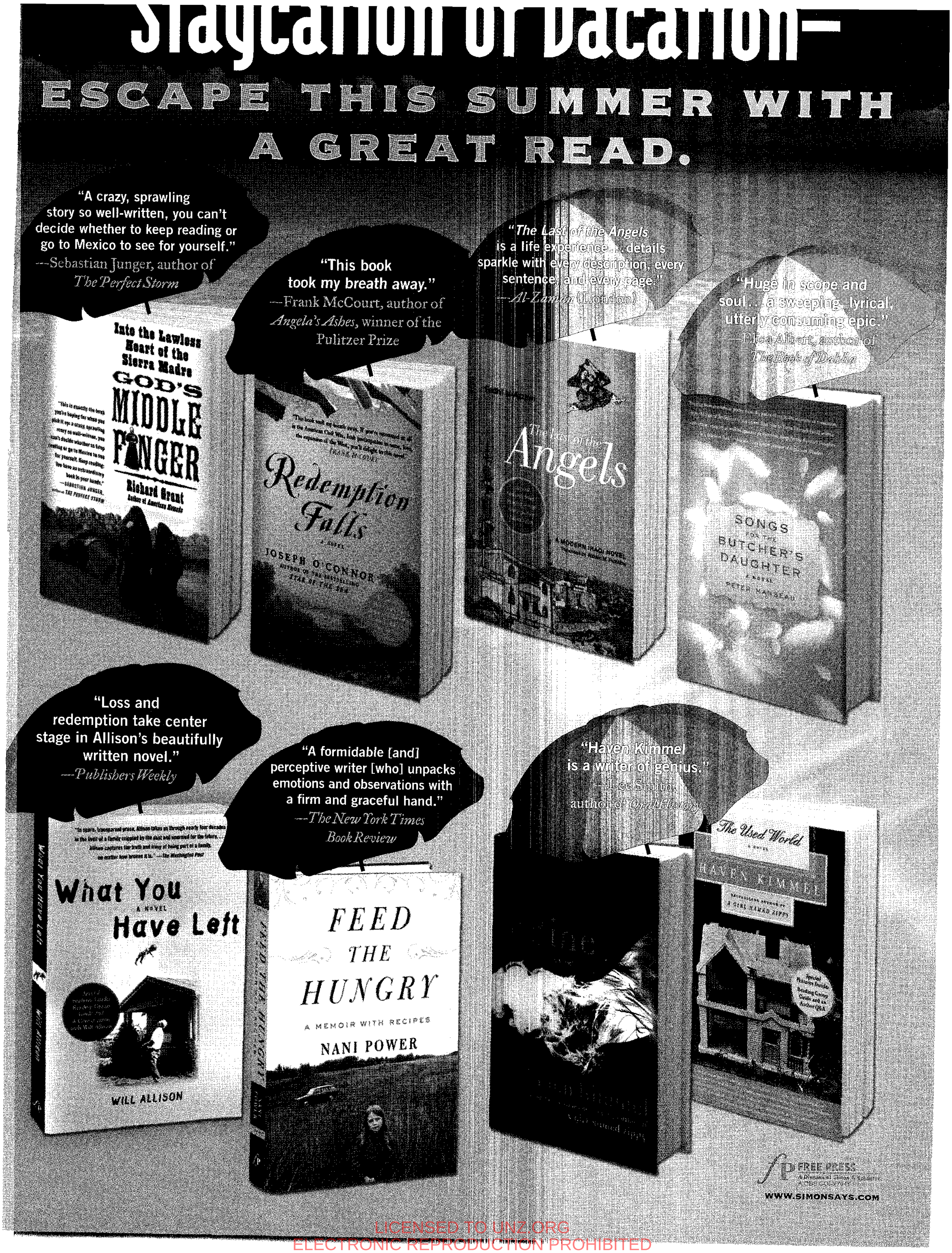
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Redemption Falls
A NOVEL
JOSEPH O'CONNOR
The Last of the Angels
SONGS FOR THE BUTCHER'S DAUGHTER
A NOVEL
PETER MANSEAU
What You Have Left
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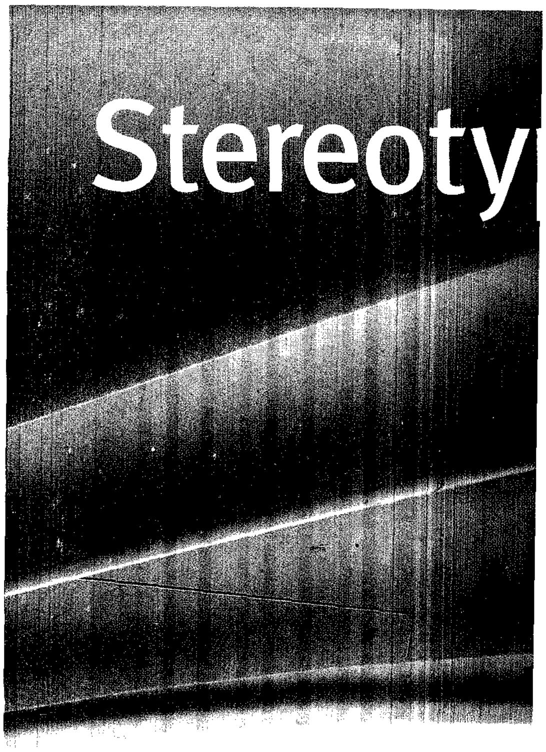
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